Allocating London's Social Homes



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Altair

G15

London Housing Directors' Group

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Allocating London’s social homes

“Having worked in social housing for over 30 years, across housing associations and local government, and as a social housing tenant myself, I know how important it is that the homes we have are used well and that residents have a positive experience.

“Chairing the G15 Housing Directors’ Group has reinforced the value of working together, particularly when the challenges we face are shared across the sector.

“This research gives us a practical basis for improving how councils and housing associations allocate and let homes across London. I’m particularly pleased that we’ve undertaken this work jointly with the London Housing Directors’ Group, and I hope it marks the beginning of closer collaboration on the issues that matter to residents.”

Maxine Gordon
Chair, G15 Housing Directors’ Group | Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing

“London’s councils bear witness every day to the human impact of the capital’s housing shortage. Growing numbers of households face homelessness, overcrowding and long waits for a suitable home. And in turn we see huge pressure on council staff and budgets. With so few social homes becoming available each year, we have a responsibility to make sure the system works as effectively and fairly as possible.

“This research reflects the shared commitment of London’s councils and housing associations to improve how homes are allocated and let. It identifies practical changes we can make together, from strengthening nomination arrangements to supporting urgent moves and making better use of existing homes.

“The task now is to build a structured, consistent, and long-term approach to collaboration which makes a tangible difference for Londoners in housing need.”

Dan Hawthorn
Co-Chair, London Housing Directors’ Group | Camden Council

Executive summary

MAKING BETTER USE OF LONDON’S SOCIAL HOMES

London faces a severe shortage of social housing. The number of households needing a secure, affordable home substantially exceeds the number of properties becoming available.

In 2024/25, 341,009 households were on London’s housing registers, compared with 20,663 general needs social lettings. Just 2.7% of existing social homes were relet during the year.

Behind these figures are people and families experiencing homelessness, overcrowding, unsuitable housing or urgent circumstances that require them to move.

Increasing the supply of social rented homes remains essential. But alongside this, councils and housing associations have a shared responsibility to make the best possible use of existing homes.

The G15 and London Housing Directors’ Group commissioned Altair to examine how social housing allocations, nominations and lettings operate across London and identify practical opportunities for improvement.

The research draws on the experience of councils and housing associations to identify practical improvements to how London’s social homes are allocated and let.

What the research found

Three key themes emerged:

Existing homes could be used more effectively. Mobility, rightsizing, vacancy chains, accessible housing matching and action on tenancy fraud could help more households access suitable accommodation.

Inconsistent processes can create delays and make the system harder to navigate. Councils and housing associations have legitimate differences in responsibilities, policies and local priorities. The research identified opportunities to improve consistency in how organisations work together, particularly around nominations, information sharing and assessments. Repeated checks, incomplete information and unclear communication can lead to delays, duplication and uncertainty for applicants, particularly when responsibility passes between organisations.

Better data is needed to understand performance and support improvement. More consistent information and shared measures would help partners identify delays, understand performance and evaluate improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES FOR JOINT ACTION

The research identified a range of opportunities to improve how London's social homes are allocated and let. These have informed ten recommendations for councils and housing associations, alongside ten recommendations for government on the national policy, funding and wider housing pressures affecting allocations.

To identify where joint action should begin, senior leaders from London councils and housing associations considered the emerging findings and proposed improvements at a workshop in September 2026. Participants assessed the options against their likely impact, importance and practicality, identifying four priorities for initial collaboration:

1. **Strengthening partnership arrangements and processes.**
2. **Improving nomination agreements and processes.**
3. **Developing better arrangements for urgent moves.**
4. **Supporting mobility, rightsizing and vacancy chains.**

These four priorities form part of the wider recommendations for councils and housing associations. They provide a focus for building on existing work and strengthening collaboration across London, alongside further improvements that partners can take forward through ongoing work and targeted pilots.

1. London's allocations challenge

A GROWING NEED FOR A LIMITED NUMBER OF HOMES

Social housing provides secure and affordable accommodation for households whose housing needs cannot be adequately met through the market.

In London, demand for these homes substantially exceeds the number available.

- **341,009: Households on London's housing registers in 2024/25[1].**
- **20,663: General needs social lettings during 2024/25[2].**
- **2.7%: Proportion of existing social homes relet during the year[3].**

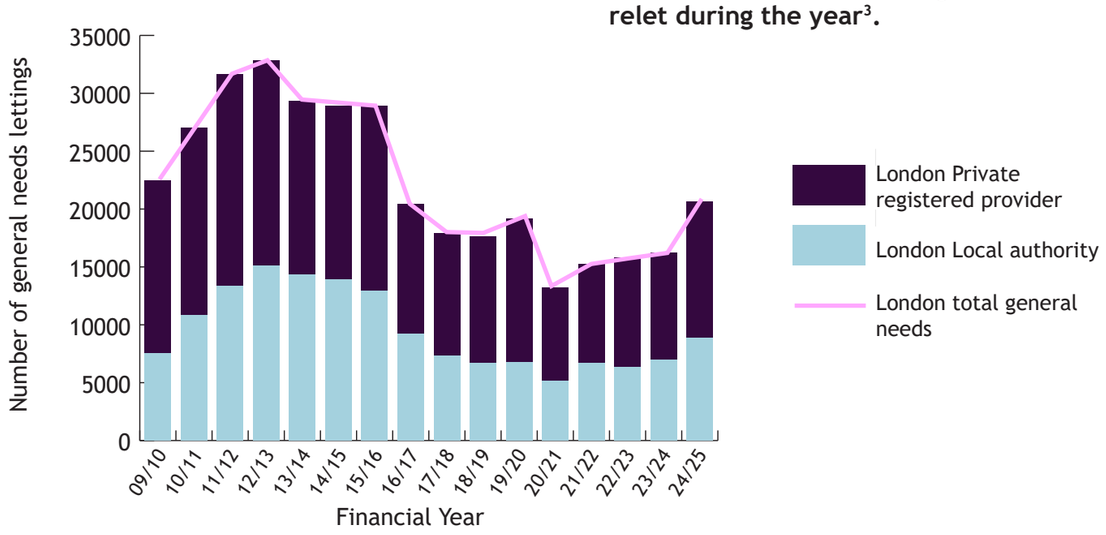


Figure 1 General needs lettings by provider in London over time. Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Social housing lettings, Table 1di: New social housing lettings by region of property, 2009/10 to 2024/25

Being on a housing register does not necessarily mean a household is waiting in a single queue for a home. Councils operate allocation schemes that determine qualification and priority, and the circumstances of households on registers vary

Nevertheless, the figures demonstrate the significant gap between housing need and the homes becoming available.

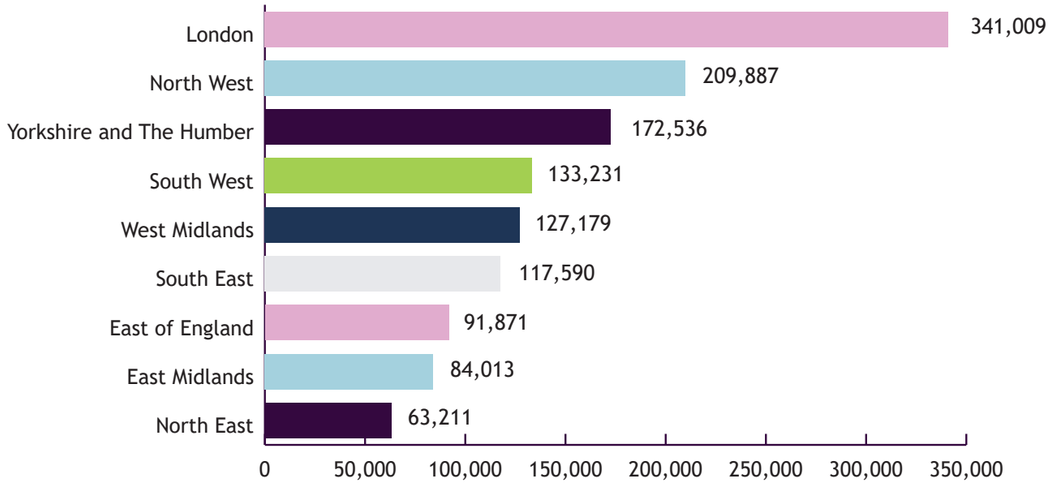


Figure 2 Number of households on local authority housing register by region. Source: Local Authority Housing Statistics, 2024/25.

Scarcity does not affect every household equally.

Among London households receiving general needs social lettings, the proportion who had spent five years or more on the housing register increased with the size of the property. It was 14.7% for one-bedroom homes, 27.9% for two-bedroom homes, 43.9% for three-bedroom homes and 45.5% for homes with four or more bedrooms[4].

These figures illustrate the particular difficulties faced by households requiring larger homes.
This has consequences for how homes are allocated. Councils must make decisions about competing needs, while housing associations must ensure that available properties are suitable and that tenancies can be sustained.

Improving the allocations process can help households access available homes more efficiently. It cannot overcome the underlying shortage.

LONDON'S PARTICULAR PRESSURES

Housing pressures vary across England, but London faces specific challenges associated with high housing costs, limited availability and the types of accommodation needed.

The system is also particularly complex, with nearly 390 registered providers operating across 32 boroughs and the City of London[5].

Each organisation has its own responsibilities, policies and operational arrangements, creating a substantial coordination challenge. The number of organisations involved makes effective partnerships, clear nomination agreements and consistent information sharing especially important.

The shortage also affects the choices available to councils when responding to homelessness, overcrowding and other urgent housing needs.

Households requiring larger family homes, accessible accommodation or specialist housing can face particularly limited options.

For example, a one-bedroom home cannot meet the needs of a family requiring three or four bedrooms. An unadapted home is likely to be unsuitable for a household with specific disabilities. But people's needs are often very specific, so an adapted home isn't necessarily suitable for everyone who needs adaptations.

The relationship between housing need and the size, location and accessibility of available homes is therefore central to effective allocations.

MATCHING SUPPLY WITH DEMAND

The size and type of homes being delivered are important considerations for London's allocations system, particularly for households requiring larger family accommodation. Figure 3 compares the bedroom-size profile of affordable housing completions under GLA programmes with the requirements recorded on local authority housing registers.

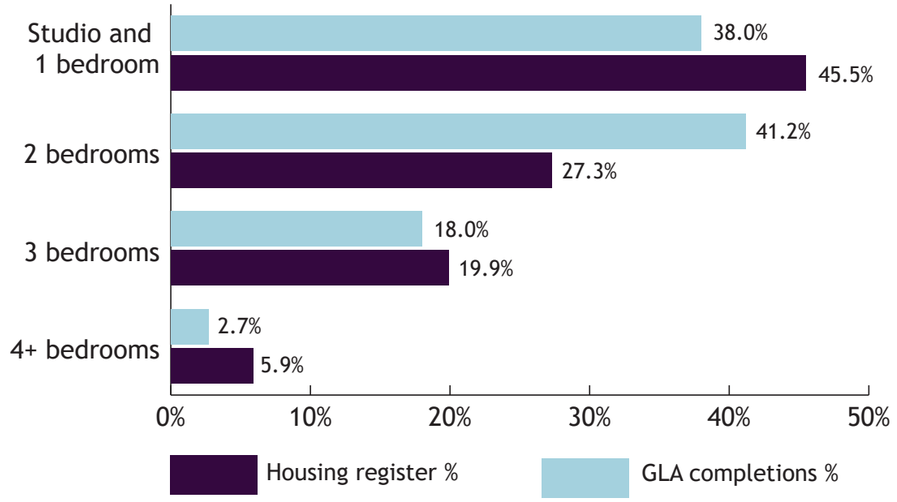


Figure 3 Affordable housing completions by bedroom size compared to housing register bedroom size requirements. Source: Greater London Authority (GLA) Affordable Housing Programmes: homes by number of bedrooms - completions 2024/25-2026/27 and MHCLG (2025) Local Authority Housing Statistics 2024/25.

The figures suggest a particular challenge for larger family homes. Three-bedroom properties accounted for 18% of completions, compared with 19.9% of recorded requirements. For homes with four or more bedrooms, the difference was greater, with 2.7% of completions compared with 5.9% of requirements.

These figures need careful interpretation. Affordable housing completions include different tenures, while households on housing registers have differing levels of priority under councils' allocation schemes. Not everyone on a housing register is likely to receive an allocation, so these figures should not be treated as a direct measure of unmet housing need.

However, wider evidence reinforces the shortage of family-sized social rented accommodation. Centre for London research published in October 2024 estimated average waiting times of around five years for three-bedroom homes, rising to more than six years for homes with four or more bedrooms[6]. Government statistics also show that 6% of new general needs lettings in London in 2024/25 were to households receiving homes with fewer bedrooms than required under the bedroom standard, the highest proportion of any English region[7].

Taken together, the evidence strengthens the case for increasing the supply of family-sized social rented homes, particularly those with three or more bedrooms. Overcrowding can have serious consequences for physical and mental health, family wellbeing and children's development.

Funding arrangements also need to recognise the additional costs of delivering larger properties, including consideration of grant calculated by habitable room rather than solely by home.

2. Understanding the allocations system

DIFFERENT RESPONSIBILITIES, SHARED OBJECTIVES

Social housing allocations involve decisions and processes across councils and housing associations.

Local authorities operate allocation schemes within the national legal framework. These establish who qualifies for social housing and how priority is determined[8]. Housing associations provide a substantial proportion of London's social homes and work with councils through nomination arrangements.

WHAT IS AN ALLOCATION?

An allocation is the offer of a social home under a council's published allocations scheme.

Councils publish the scheme; housing associations own 49.9% of general needs homes in London - so allocation depends on the two working together.

NOMINATION AGREEMENT

The link between council and landlord. It sets the proportion of lettings available for nominations, the criteria for accepting or rejecting a nominee, and how disputes are resolved. Where a register or policy is shared, this becomes common housing register or common allocations policy.

LOCAL AUTHORITY

- Publishes an allocations scheme and allocates homes in line with it
- Assesses applications and sets priority; may hold a housing register but is not required to
- Nominates households to housing association vacancies
- Will let homes owned in accordance with allocations policy

HOUSING ASSOCIATION

- Owns around half of social housing in London, so holds the homes being let
- Must cooperate with a council's nomination request where reasonable in the circumstances
- Often carries out pre-tenancy, affordability and suitability checks prior to let

HOUSEHOLD

- Applies to the scheme and joins the housing register if they qualify or existing tenant not on register with urgent need to move
- Assessed on need e.g. homelessness, overcrowding, health or disability
- Bids for advertised homes under choice-based lettings, used by 91% of councils or offered directly

ALLOCATION

A council identifies a household for an available home under its allocation scheme[9].

NOMINATION

The council refers the household to a social landlord[10].

LETTING

The landlord completes the relevant checks and, where appropriate, grants a tenancy.

These stages often involve organisations with different statutory duties, policies and operational requirements.

Councils must balance housing need and local priorities through their allocation schemes. Many also manage and let their own social homes, facing the same challenges as housing associations in assessing suitability, completing necessary checks, preparing properties and supporting sustainable tenancies.

Housing associations undertake these responsibilities for their homes, often working with councils through nomination arrangements. Effective allocations depend on clear responsibilities and coordination between organisations, particularly where applicants move between council and housing association processes[11].

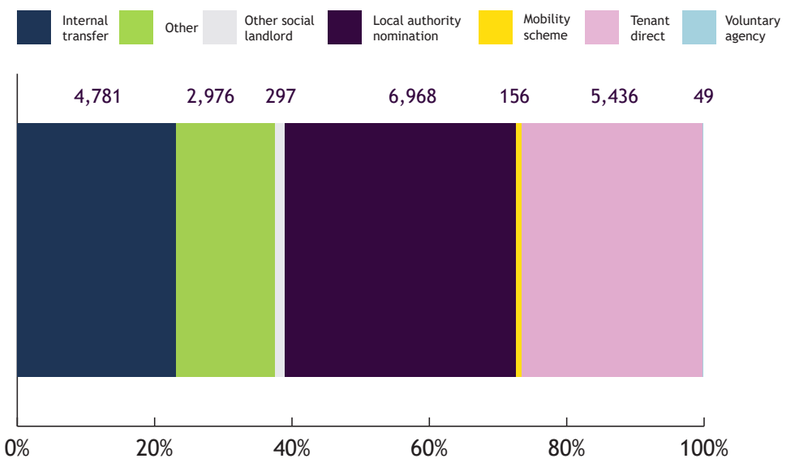


Figure 4 Source of referral to general needs letting. Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) CORE sub-national data dashboard, 2024/25.

Figure 4 also highlights the importance of meeting the needs of existing residents. Internal transfers accounted for 4,781 general needs lettings in London in 2024/25, around 23% of the total[12]. Councils and housing associations must respond to residents whose existing homes no longer meet their needs, including those experiencing severe overcrowding, requiring accessible accommodation or facing risks to their safety. Transfers can help prevent circumstances from worsening, with potential consequences for residents' health, wellbeing and ability to sustain their tenancies. They can also help prevent homelessness and release homes for other households. Allocations therefore need to balance the needs of existing residents with those seeking access to social housing.

Councils and housing associations work together every day to allocate homes and respond to housing need.

The research identified positive relationships and examples of effective collaboration across London. These provide an important foundation for further improvements. However, arrangements for coordinating activity, sharing information, monitoring outcomes and resolving difficulties are not always consistent.

The research explored how stronger partnership structures and clearer expectations could support organisations in carrying out their respective responsibilities. These findings inform the recommendations for joint action later in this report.

3. What we learned about London's allocations system

The research examined how social housing allocations operate across London, drawing on published data, the experiences of councils and housing associations, operational discussions and examples of practice.

It identified three recurring issues that influence how effectively homes are allocated, nominated and let.

3.1 MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF EXISTING SOCIAL HOMES

With relatively few new or existing social homes becoming available each year, making effective use of the homes already available is essential.

There is also a significant mismatch between the size of some social homes and the needs of the households living in them. Census 2021 data shows that around one in five social rented households across London's subregions were overcrowded, while around one in four had more bedrooms than required under the occupancy standard.

Overcrowding can have serious consequences for residents' physical and mental health, family wellbeing and children's education and development. At the same time, under-occupation presents opportunities to support residents whose circumstances have changed to move into homes better suited to their needs, potentially releasing larger properties for overcrowded families. Supporting these moves is an important part of addressing the mismatch and making better use of London's existing social housing.

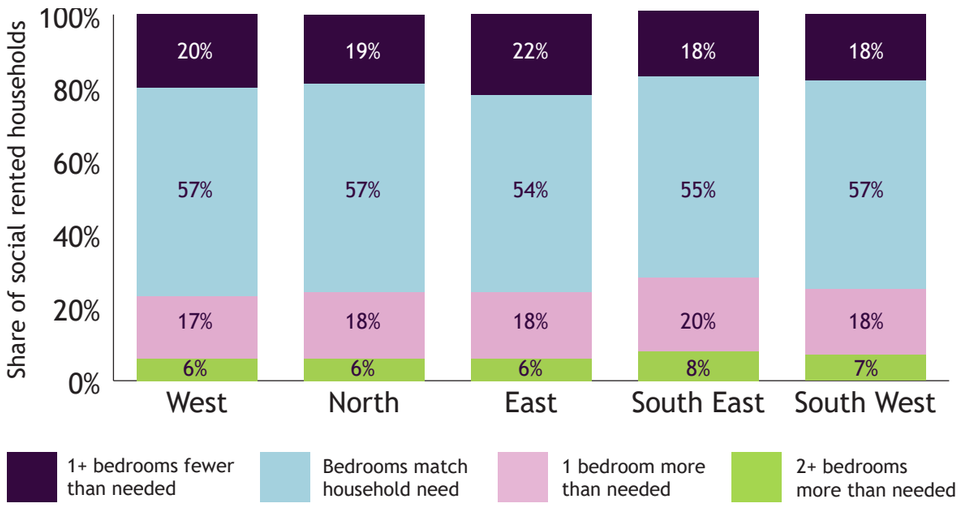


Figure 5 Occupancy in social housing for London subregions showing bedrooms for households relative to need. Source: Census 2021.

The research identified examples of voluntary rightsizing and coordinated moves that helped residents find more suitable accommodation while releasing homes for other households. For example, someone moving to a smaller property can free up a larger home for an overcrowded family, whose move may then make another property available. These vacancy chains can help rehouse several households from a single initial move[13].

There is scope to develop this approach more widely across London. Better coordination between councils and housing associations, practical help with moving costs and identifying suitable alternative homes could enable more residents to move. New housing developments also provide opportunities to plan moves and vacancy chains, particularly where new homes can meet the needs of existing residents and release larger properties for families.

Better matching of adapted and accessible homes is another opportunity. People may need very specific adaptations, making it harder to find a suitable property. More consistent information about the accessibility features of homes and the individual needs of applicants, supported by specialist assessments where appropriate, would help reduce unsuitable offers and make better use of adapted properties[14].

This information could also inform new housing developments, helping councils and housing associations plan the number, type and location of accessible and adaptable homes to meet local needs.

Reducing the time homes remain empty would also help households move into suitable accommodation more quickly. The research identified delays in preparing empty properties for reletting. Better coordination between repairs, lettings and nominations teams, earlier planning and clearer information about required works could help speed up the process while maintaining safety and quality standards[15].

Finally, tenancy fraud is often exploitative and deprives households in genuine housing need of a secure, affordable home. Stronger information sharing, prevention and joint investigation between councils and housing associations could help tackle fraud and return unlawfully occupied homes to legitimate use[16].

There are various challenges and barriers to implementation, but taken together these approaches offer practical ways to help Londoners move into suitable homes more quickly, improve mobility and make better use of the capital's existing social housing.

3.2 INCONSISTENT PROCESSES CREATE DELAYS AND MAKE THE SYSTEM HARDER TO NAVIGATE

London's boroughs face different housing pressures, and their allocation schemes reflect these circumstances. Qualification criteria, priority arrangements, local connection requirements and approaches to assessing housing need vary between councils. Housing associations also operate their own policies and processes as social landlords, reflecting their legal responsibilities and organisational priorities[17].

Some differences are necessary, particularly given the distinct responsibilities of councils and housing associations. However, others reflect established practice rather than a clear requirement and could be simplified or standardised.

This variation can make the allocations system difficult to navigate, particularly where applicants seek housing across borough boundaries or move between different stages of the process.

Applicants may need to provide evidence of their circumstances, respond to requests for further information, attend viewings and complete checks undertaken by different organisations. While these requirements serve important purposes, the research identified concerns about repeated assessments, inconsistent information, delays and unclear communication[18].

Problems can arise when nominations are made with incomplete information, when applicants are asked to provide evidence that has already been collected or verified by another organisation, or when decisions are not clearly explained. This can lead to repeated assessments, unsuccessful nominations, delays and additional work for both organisations, while leaving applicants uncertain about why an offer has not proceeded.

The research also identified inconsistencies in how applicants are kept informed, including the information provided about available properties, expectations before moving and explanations when nominations or offers do not proceed.

There are opportunities to improve consistency at the points where organisations interact, including information requirements, assessment processes, nomination arrangements and communication with applicants. Clearer responsibilities and more effective information sharing could reduce duplication, improve the applicant experience and help suitable homes be let more quickly.

3.3 BETTER DATA IS NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES

The research found that councils and housing associations do not always have a consistent picture of the allocations process from application through to letting.

Organisations collect and manage information through different systems, using varying definitions, reporting arrangements and operational practices. This can make it difficult to understand why nominations do not proceed, where delays occur or which interventions are most effective.

For example, information about an unsuccessful nomination may be recorded differently by the council and housing association involved. Without consistent definitions, it becomes harder to identify recurring problems or compare outcomes.

Similar issues arise in understanding empty-home periods, applicant refusals, mobility outcomes and the use of adapted properties.

Better information could help partners distinguish between delays caused by necessary works or assessments and those that might be avoided through changes to processes.

It could also improve transparency and support more informed decisions about where resources should be directed.

The research points to the importance of understanding the information collected at different stages, how organisations use it and where gaps affect their ability to monitor outcomes.

4. Priorities for improving allocations

The research provides a practical basis for improving how councils and housing associations work together. At a senior leaders' workshop in September 2026, participants considered the emerging findings and assessed potential improvements against their likely impact, importance and practicality.

Four areas emerged as priorities for joint action: partnership arrangements and processes, nomination agreements and processes, urgent moves, and mobility, rightsizing and vacancy chains.

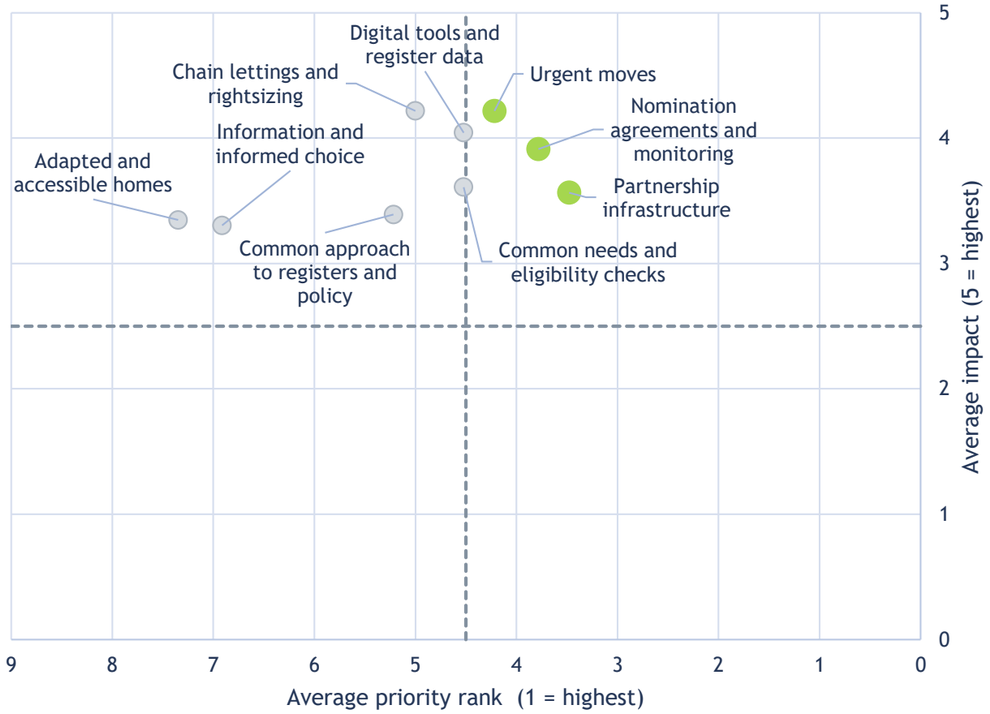


Figure 6 Impact and prioritisation matrix for the nine options voted on. Response numbers = 23.

The research identified a wider range of opportunities to improve allocations, reflected in the ten recommendations below. These include the four priorities identified by senior leaders, alongside further improvements to applicant communication, data sharing, accessible housing, empty homes and tenancy sustainment. Together, they provide a basis for further collaboration between councils and housing associations, building on existing practice.

4.1 GETTING THE FOUNDATIONS RIGHT: PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS, NOMINATION AGREEMENTS, INFORMATION SHARING AND ASSESSMENTS.

Recommendation 1: Establish stronger London-wide partnership arrangements, supported by clear governance, operational contacts, escalation routes and shared accountability.

Councils and housing associations already work closely together to allocate homes and respond to housing need. The research found considerable commitment to partnership working, but the arrangements supporting these relationships are not always consistent. In some cases, organisations rely on established personal contacts or informal processes to resolve difficulties, while regular performance reviews, escalation routes and arrangements for sharing learning are less well developed. This can make it harder to maintain continuity when staff change or to address issues that involve several organisations.

We propose strengthening London-wide partnership arrangements through joint strategic oversight and more structured operational collaboration, potentially led by London Housing Directors' Group and G15.

An initial step would be to establish and maintain a shared directory of operational and escalation contacts, supported by regular joint reviews of performance and emerging issues. Over time, these arrangements could provide a framework for agreeing common approaches, sharing effective practice and coordinating work on the other recommendations in this report.

The intention is to build on existing local relationships and make it easier for councils and housing associations to resolve problems together. Clear ownership and accountability will be important, particularly where issues cross organisational or borough boundaries.

Recommendation 2: Develop more consistent nomination agreements, with clearer responsibilities, information requirements, response times, monitoring and escalation arrangements.

Nomination agreements establish how councils refer households to housing associations for available homes and define the responsibilities of each organisation. The research found that these agreements are not always reviewed regularly or supported by consistent monitoring arrangements. Differences in information requirements, eligibility and suitability checks, response times and approaches to unsuccessful nominations can create uncertainty and contribute to delays. These issues are particularly difficult where responsibilities are not clearly understood or where there is no established route for resolving disagreements.

We propose developing a common London approach to nomination agreements, including a model template that partners can adapt to local circumstances. This should set out the information required when a nomination is made, the checks undertaken by each organisation, expected response times and arrangements for escalation. It should also establish how unsuccessful nominations are recorded and reviewed, allowing partners to identify recurring problems and distinguish between different reasons why lettings do not proceed.

The aim is to improve consistency at the points where councils and housing associations work together, while retaining appropriate local discretion. More reliable information and clearer expectations should reduce unnecessary duplication, support more timely decisions and improve the experience of applicants.

Recommendation 3: Develop a shared approach to needs and eligibility checks

The research identified opportunities to improve how councils and housing associations assess and verify household information. Applicants may be asked to provide similar evidence at different stages, while organisations can have different requirements for establishing eligibility, suitability, affordability or support needs. Some checks are necessary because councils and landlords have distinct responsibilities, but greater clarity about what information can be relied upon could reduce avoidable duplication.

We propose developing a shared framework that distinguishes between information that can be accepted from another organisation, evidence that needs updating and assessments that landlords must undertake themselves. This should be tested with operational teams to ensure that any changes maintain

appropriate safeguards, comply with legal requirements and support sustainable tenancies. The framework could then inform the development of more consistent nomination arrangements.

Recommendation 4: Improve data standards and targeted digital tools

Differences in systems, terminology and reporting make it harder for councils and housing associations to exchange information and understand how nominations progress. The research identified opportunities to improve the consistency of information collected at different stages, particularly where incomplete or incompatible records lead to further checks or make it difficult to understand why a nomination has not resulted in a letting.

We propose agreeing minimum information requirements and common definitions for key stages of the nomination and letting process. These could support more consistent monitoring and provide a foundation for targeted digital improvements, such as secure information exchange, applicant updates and better reporting. The priority should be to address specific operational problems and make better use of existing systems, rather than assume that London needs a single allocations platform.

4.2 IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE OF ALLOCATING AND LETTING HOMES: APPLICANT COMMUNICATION, URGENT MOVES, EMPTY HOMES AND TENANCY SUSTAINMENT.

Recommendation 5: Create a clearer applicant experience

Applicants may deal with several organisations and be asked to provide information at different stages before a tenancy begins. The research identified concerns about unclear communication, inconsistent property information and uncertainty about decisions, particularly when nominations or offers do not proceed. These experiences can be especially difficult for households already facing homelessness, overcrowding or other pressures.

We propose developing minimum expectations for applicant communication across the nomination and letting process. This could include clearer information about available properties, what applicants need to provide, who is responsible for contacting them and how decisions will be explained. The approach should recognise the different responsibilities of councils and housing associations while providing a more consistent experience for applicants.

Together, these recommendations are particularly relevant to the government's review of statutory allocations guidance and proposed changes to homelessness referrals. Clear nomination arrangements, appropriate checks and effective communication will be important to ensuring that any changes can be implemented successfully.

Recommendation 6: Develop a more coordinated London-wide approach to urgent moves, including domestic abuse, threats to safety and other exceptional circumstances.

Some households need to move urgently because remaining in their current home presents a serious risk to their safety or wellbeing. These circumstances can require councils and housing associations to work across landlord and borough boundaries, often within very short timescales. Existing reciprocal arrangements provide important routes for urgent moves, but the research identified opportunities to improve coordination and establish clearer processes for referrals, assessments and decisions.

We propose building on existing arrangements to develop a more consistent London-wide approach to urgent moves. This should include clearer referral pathways, agreed expectations about response times, appropriate information sharing and arrangements for resolving difficulties when a suitable property cannot be identified. Safeguarding responsibilities, risk assessments and the support needed before and after a move must remain central to the process.

This work should also inform the GLA's review of Housing Moves, which provides an existing route for eligible social housing tenants to move across London, particularly where they need to relocate because of domestic abuse. The G15 and London Housing Directors' Group should work with the GLA to ensure the review reflects the operational experience of councils and housing associations, including barriers to referrals, the availability of suitable homes and opportunities to strengthen cross-borough arrangements. Following the review, partners should support awareness and take-up of any revised scheme, ensuring that staff understand the eligibility criteria, referral routes and support available to residents.

Any approach should be developed with relevant safeguarding expertise and reflect the different circumstances that can create urgent housing need. The objective is to reduce unnecessary delays and repeated assessments, while ensuring that moves are safe, appropriate and supported.

Recommendation 7: Develop a shared approach to reducing avoidable delays in preparing and reletting empty social homes.

The time taken to prepare and relet empty homes affects how quickly households can access accommodation and how effectively existing social housing is used. The research identified repairs and essential work to vacant properties as a significant source of delay, alongside opportunities to improve coordination between repairs, lettings and nominations teams. Some works are necessary to ensure that homes are safe and meet the required standards, but better information and planning could help organisations identify and reduce avoidable delays.

We propose developing a shared approach to understanding and measuring the different stages of the empty-home process, from a property becoming vacant through to a new household moving in. This could include earlier notice of forthcoming vacancies, clearer information about required works and better coordination of nominations while appropriate repairs are underway. Consistent measures would also allow organisations to distinguish between delays caused by necessary works and those that could be addressed through operational changes.

Further work with councils, housing associations and government could establish where practical changes or targeted investment would have the greatest effect. This should build on existing improvements to empty-home management and focus on returning suitable homes to use as promptly as possible.

Recommendation 8: Improve early identification of affordability, accessibility and support needs, alongside clearer responsibilities for coordinating assistance.

The research highlighted the increasing complexity of the circumstances facing some households entering social housing, including affordability pressures, health and disability-related needs, and requirements for ongoing support. Where these issues are identified late in the nominations process, they can delay a letting or prevent it from proceeding. They can also create difficulties after a household moves in if appropriate services or assistance are not in place.

We propose improving how councils and housing associations identify and communicate relevant needs at an early stage, including the support already available to a household and any additional arrangements required to sustain a tenancy. Clearer responsibilities and better coordination with health, care and support services could help partners make informed decisions about suitability and ensure that households receive appropriate assistance.

The availability of wider support services remains an important consideration. Improvements to allocations processes cannot resolve gaps in housing-related support or specialist provision, which is why the research also identifies a need for sustained national funding.

4.3 MAKING BETTER USE OF EXISTING HOMES

Recommendation 9: Strengthen approaches to mobility, rightsizing, mutual exchange and coordinated vacancy chains, alongside joint action on tenancy fraud.

Making better use of existing social homes is particularly important in London, where the number of available properties is limited.

The research identified examples of councils and housing associations already working together to support moves that release accommodation for other households. These approaches could be developed more consistently across London.

Voluntary rightsizing can help residents move to homes that better meet their current needs while releasing larger properties for households experiencing overcrowding.

Mutual exchanges and cross-boundary mobility can also provide opportunities for residents whose circumstances have changed.

Coordinated vacancy chains may increase the number of successful lettings generated from an initial move.

However, these approaches depend on suitable accommodation being available and residents receiving appropriate practical support. Financial assistance, moving arrangements, accessibility and the location of alternative homes can all influence whether a move is possible.

Coordinating vacancy chains can take more time and resources than an individual letting, creating a potential tension with efforts to reduce the time homes remain empty. Earlier planning, clearer information sharing and better coordination between allocations, lettings and repairs teams can help manage this. The aim should be to maximise the number of households benefiting from each available home while minimising unnecessary delays.

We propose exploring how existing schemes could be strengthened, including through targeted pilots and improved coordination between landlords and councils.

New housing developments also offer opportunities to plan voluntary rightsizing and linked moves in advance. Where new homes meet the needs of existing residents, transfers can release larger properties for overcrowded families and create further letting opportunities through coordinated vacancy chains.

The research also identified tenancy fraud as an area where stronger collaboration could help return homes to use. This includes more consistent information sharing, prevention and investigation, alongside consideration of how resources and incentives are distributed between organisations.

The outcomes of mobility initiatives and tenancy fraud activity should be measured separately, distinguishing moves enabled from homes recovered.

Recommendation 10: Improve the allocation of adapted and accessible homes

The research identified difficulties in matching adapted and accessible homes to households whose needs they can meet. Property information is not always recorded or presented consistently, and the requirements of applicants may not be sufficiently detailed to support an appropriate match. This can lead to unsuitable offers, delays and missed opportunities to make effective use of specialist accommodation.

We propose developing more consistent descriptions of accessible properties and household requirements, alongside clearer matching criteria and earlier involvement from occupational therapists or other specialists where appropriate. This could improve the information available to applicants and allocations teams, reduce unsuccessful offers and support better use of homes that have been adapted to meet needs.



5. What London needs from the government

The research identifies practical changes that councils and housing associations can take forward together, but national policy and investment also shape what can be achieved. London's shortage of social rented homes, pressure on support services, high housing costs and gaps in data and operational capacity all affect the allocations system.

The following recommendations set out where government action could support local improvements and address wider pressures that cannot be resolved through changes to allocations processes alone.

5.1 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND STANDARDS

Government has an important role in supporting greater consistency across the allocations system. National leadership, clearer standards and practical guidance could help councils and housing associations work together more effectively, reduce duplication and strengthen accountability. This would provide a common framework for local improvements while allowing flexibility to respond to different housing needs and circumstances.

Recommendation 1: Create a national allocations and lettings data standard

The research found that differences in data collection, definitions and reporting make it difficult to understand how households move through the allocations process and why some nominations or lettings do not proceed. This limits the ability of organisations and government to identify recurring problems, compare outcomes and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

We recommend establishing a national allocations and lettings data standard, developed with councils and housing associations. This should define key stages, outcomes and reasons for unsuccessful nominations or lettings, alongside minimum information requirements and consistent reporting measures. A common framework would support more reliable performance monitoring and provide a stronger evidence base for future policy and investment decisions.

Recommendation 2: Publish model data-sharing agreements and technical standards

Effective allocations depend on councils and housing associations being able to exchange relevant information lawfully, securely and efficiently. The research identified uncertainty and variation in how information is shared, which can contribute to repeated checks, incomplete nominations and delays. Organisations also need clarity about their responsibilities for maintaining and updating information.

We recommend that government publish practical model data-sharing agreements and technical standards for defined allocations and nomination purposes, developed with the sector and relevant information governance expertise. These should clarify what information can be shared, the legal basis for doing so, responsibilities for data quality and appropriate safeguards. Consistent national guidance would help reduce duplication and support local improvements to nominations processes.

Recommendation 3: Take national action on tenancy fraud

Tenancy fraud prevents social homes from being available to households in genuine housing need and can be difficult and resource-intensive to identify and address. The research identified opportunities for stronger prevention, information sharing and investigation, alongside challenges arising from the different responsibilities and incentives of councils and housing associations. Recovering unlawfully occupied homes can increase the accommodation available for legitimate lettings, but effective action requires appropriate expertise and resources.

Building on the Cabinet Office's work with Airbnb, we recommend a coordinated national approach to tenancy fraud, including consistent definitions, improved reporting and support for prevention and investigation. This should recognise the costs incurred by different organisations and consider how recovered homes and associated benefits are measured. National action could strengthen local partnerships and support the return of more social homes to use.

5.2 TARGETED FUNDING AND PLACE-BASED PILOTS TO IMPROVE ALLOCATIONS

Targeted funding could help councils and housing associations test and expand practical improvements that are difficult to deliver within existing resources. Investment in professional capacity, mobility schemes and empty-home initiatives could support better use of existing homes and more efficient lettings. Localised pilots should build on existing practice, with clear measures of their impact on residents, housing outcomes and value for money.

Recommendation 4: Establish a mobility and rightsizing fund

Voluntary mobility and rightsizing can help residents move to homes that better meet their circumstances while releasing accommodation for households in greater housing need. However, the research identified barriers including moving costs, limited suitable alternatives and the practical challenges of coordinating moves across organisations and borough boundaries. These constraints can prevent potentially beneficial moves from taking place.

We recommend establishing a dedicated mobility and rightsizing fund to support practical assistance, moving costs and evaluated local or sub-regional pilots. Funding could help councils and housing associations test approaches to coordinated vacancy chains, cross-boundary moves and improved support for residents who wish to move. Evaluation should consider resident outcomes as well as the number and suitability of homes made available.

Recommendation 5: Fund allocations capacity and professional development

Allocations services manage complex legal, operational and safeguarding responsibilities, often under significant pressure. The research highlighted the importance of having sufficient capacity and professional expertise to maintain accurate information, assess household circumstances consistently, make timely decisions and support applicants. These responsibilities are becoming more demanding as housing need increases and the circumstances of applicants become more complex.

We recommend a dedicated, multi-year improvement fund to strengthen allocations services across councils and housing associations. This could support workforce capacity, professional development and the implementation of improvements to information management, assessment processes and applicant communication. Funding should recognise the operational demands placed on allocations teams and enable organisations to invest in sustainable improvements.

Recommendation 6: Fund a pilot to reduce the time taken to bring empty homes to lettable standard

The research identified the time taken to prepare empty homes as an important factor affecting the availability of social housing. Necessary repairs, inspections and safety work can extend the period before a property can be relet, while differences in operational processes make it difficult to determine where delays could be reduced. More consistent evidence is needed to understand which interventions have the greatest effect.

We recommend a government-funded pilot involving councils and housing associations to test approaches to reducing avoidable empty-home periods. This should include consistent measurement of the stages between a property becoming vacant and a new household moving in, alongside testing changes to coordination, planning and information sharing. The findings could inform future guidance and investment decisions.

Recommendation 7: Introduce a national fund to bring long-term empty social homes back into use

Some social homes remain empty for extended periods because substantial investment is needed to meet required standards. These properties represent an important potential source of accommodation, but the costs of returning them to use may exceed the resources available to individual landlords. This is particularly challenging where homes require extensive repairs or improvement works.

We recommend targeted national funding to help councils and housing associations restore long-term empty social homes and return them to use. Funding should be directed towards properties where investment can secure suitable, sustainable accommodation and provide value relative to alternative options. This would complement efforts to reduce routine empty-home turnaround times.

5.3 WIDER INVESTMENT AND HOUSING SYSTEM REFORM

Wider pressures across the housing system are making it increasingly difficult for councils and housing associations to allocate homes effectively. The shortage of social rented homes, limited housing-related support and affordability pressures restrict the options available to households and place additional strain on allocations services. Addressing these pressures through sustained investment and wider policy reform is essential to improving how the system operates and ensuring more households can access suitable, secure accommodation.

Recommendation 8: Target investment in housing supply at unmet needs

The shortage of suitable social housing remains the principal constraint on London's allocations system. The research demonstrates the gap between the number of households seeking social housing and the homes becoming available, with particularly limited options for households requiring larger family properties, accessible accommodation or specialist housing. Improving allocations can make better use of existing homes, but it cannot provide sufficient accommodation without an increase in supply.

We recommend that government investment in new social rented housing reflects the types and locations of homes needed by households. This should include stronger consideration of local evidence on bedroom requirements, accessibility and specialist provision, alongside grant levels that recognise the costs of delivering suitable accommodation in London. Sustained investment in supply is essential to reducing the pressures on allocations and improving housing outcomes over the longer term.

Recommendation 9: Restore long-term support for social housing tenants with support needs

The research highlighted the importance of appropriate support for households with additional needs, particularly where health, disability, safeguarding or other circumstances affect their ability to establish and sustain a tenancy. Where services are unavailable or difficult to coordinate, nominations may be delayed and households can face greater risks of tenancy breakdown or homelessness. These challenges also place additional pressure on housing management and allocations teams.

We recommend sustainable, multi-year funding for housing-related support, including floating support services that help people maintain independent tenancies. Funding should be accompanied by stronger coordination between housing, health and social care, with clearer arrangements for identifying needs and securing appropriate assistance. This would support tenancy sustainment and reduce the likelihood of households returning to housing crisis.

Recommendation 10: Relink Local Housing Allowance rates to current local rents

High private rents and limited affordability contribute to homelessness pressures and increase demand for social housing. Where Local Housing Allowance rates do not reflect current rents, households receiving housing support may struggle to secure or retain suitable private rented accommodation. This places further pressure on temporary accommodation and the already limited supply of social homes.

We recommend restoring Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile of current local market rents, supported by a regular review mechanism. Improving the affordability of private rented accommodation would help reduce some of the wider pressures affecting housing need and provide more options for households who cannot access social housing.



6. Taking the work forward

This work will be taken forward jointly by the G15 and London Housing Directors' Group:

London's allocations system operates under significant pressure. The shortage of social homes means difficult decisions about housing need and priority are unavoidable. For many households, long waiting times for suitable accommodation will remain a reality.

Within these constraints, councils and housing associations have opportunities to make the system clearer, more consistent and more effective. This research provides a basis for further joint action, identifying practical improvements that partners can take forward together, alongside areas requiring further testing and national action.

Our immediate focus will be on progressing the four shared priorities identified by senior leaders through the research: strengthening partnership arrangements and processes, improving nomination agreements and processes, developing more coordinated approaches to urgent moves, and making better use of existing homes through mobility, rightsizing and vacancy chains.

These areas offer practical opportunities to build on existing work and strengthen collaboration across London. Other recommendations will require further discussion, targeted testing or additional evidence to establish the most effective approach.

We will work with partners to consider how these proposals can be developed, including appropriate governance, operational ownership and arrangements for reviewing progress. We will also continue engagement with government on the national policy, funding and data changes identified in the report.

Ultimately, progress should be judged by whether households experience a clearer process, suitable homes are let more promptly and London's limited social housing is used as effectively as possible.

These improvements must sit alongside sustained investment in new social rented homes and the support services that help households secure and maintain suitable accommodation.

7. About the research

G15 and the London Housing Directors' Group commissioned Altair to examine how social housing allocations, nominations and lettings operate across London and identify practical opportunities for improvement.

The research was undertaken during 2026 and combined quantitative analysis with qualitative research and engagement with councils, housing associations and other stakeholders.

The research included:

POLICY AND DATA ANALYSIS

A review of legislation, government guidance, existing research and local allocations policies, alongside analysis of housing register and lettings data. This drew principally on 2024/25 CORE and Local Authority Housing Statistics, with Census data used to examine under-occupation.

SURVEY OF COUNCILS AND HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

An online survey conducted between 21 July and 2 September 2026, receiving 27 usable responses from 14 local authorities and 13 housing associations.

OPERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

A roundtable held on 6 August 2026 with allocations and lettings professionals, exploring applicant experiences, operational barriers and potential improvements.

INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

Interviews with strategic and operational leads, alongside detailed examples of approaches in Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Manchester.

APPLICANT EXPERIENCE

A small amount of direct evidence from people who had recently moved into social housing, supplemented by a review of published Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints and decisions.

TESTING RECOMMENDATIONS

A senior leaders' workshop held on 18 September 2026, where council and housing association representatives considered the impact, priority and practicality of proposed improvements.

The full research report provides further detail on the methodology, evidence and case studies.

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