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GPs and Headteachers demand urgent changes to housing as Lewisham elects new Mayor

In parallel open letters, almost a dozen headteachers and seven Primary Care Networks are raising the alarm on the “potentially life-threatening” state of housing in Lewisham and highlighting the devastating impact of poor conditions on children’s education and public health. They are calling on the next Mayor of Lewisham to treat this as an urgent priority.

“The housing crisis in Lewisham is reaching critical levels... we cannot afford to delay action any longer. [Housing] 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,” [write the 10 headteachers](#).

[Echoing the direct impact that poor housing standards are having on residents](#), GPs, including the Community of Practice Lead for Health Equity in Lewisham, wrote: “Our clinic rooms are full of patients experiencing lung problems, mental ill health, skin complaints and safeguarding concerns due to poor housing yet we are powerless to address the root cause.”

They drew attention to one particular case where a family of six lived in social housing with a consistent leak, leading to damp and mould in their home. One of the children presented to the emergency department a number of times due to difficulty breathing. This caused significant distress for the family and, despite repeatedly contacting the housing provider, the issue was not dealt with. The family turned to the GP and a social prescriber visited the house. Finally, the family were moved out while repairs were undertaken. For over a year, the children were living with damp and mould in the house.

“It is like mental torture going through the system,” said one of the parents at a local primary school in a group session. Others reported struggling with mental health and wellbeing as a result of their housing situation.

Together with hundreds of Lewisham residents, they will be coming together on 1st March, 1pm at Rushey Green Primary School, one of the signatories of the open letter, to put pressure on Lewisham’s Mayoral candidates to declare that housing is an emergency issue in Lewisham, and treat it as such in policy changes.

This latest campaign action follows on from [consistent campaigning](#) by Lewisham Citizens to improve

care, conditions and communication around housing in the Borough, as well as demands for [free internet](#) for everyone in temporary accommodation. Lewisham has been under increased pressure lately, as campaign groups call attention to dangerous housing conditions in places such as Milford Towers. In December 2023, Lewisham Council referred itself to the housing regulator in acknowledgement of systemic issues with housing stock.

Brenda Dacres, current Acting Mayor of Lewisham and Labour candidate for Mayor has been contacted for comment.

Green Party mayoral candidate, Michael Herron, says: "The housing crisis in Lewisham clearly shows that there are too many rogue landlords in Lewisham. If elected Mayor, I will use all the powers available to myself and the Council to crack down on these rogue landlords for the good of the people of Lewisham".

PRESS RELEASE ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Lewisham Citizens / Greenwich Citizens

Lewisham and Greenwich Citizens are alliances of education, faith, charity and community groups, organising to build people power and tackle injustice in their boroughs.

<https://www.citizensuk.org/chapters/south-london/> | @LewishamCitz | @GreenwichCUK

Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (LRMN)

LRMN has worked with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants for 30 years. We empower refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants with a specialist and holistic service. We advocate for people's rights, campaign for wider change, meet their basic needs and help them improve their wellbeing.

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