

Overview & Scrutiny

Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

All Members of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission are requested to attend the meeting of the Commission to be held as follows

Monday 12 September 2022

7.00 pm

Council Chamber, Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8 1EA

This meeting can be viewed (or replayed) via the following link:

<https://youtu.be/dsaNGQJYzag>

A back up link is provided in the event of any technical difficulties:

<https://youtu.be/hSuwDDbOoCl>

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Mark Carroll

Chief Executive, London Borough of Hackney

Members: Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ian Rathbone, Cllr Penny Wrout,
Cllr Soraya Adejare, Cllr Clare Joseph, Cllr Joseph Ogundemuren,
Cllr Sam Pallis, Cllr Ali Sadek, Cllr Sarah Young and Cllr Zoe Garbett

Agenda

ALL MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|
| 4 | Changes to the Housing Register and Lettings Policy | (Pages 7 - 16) |
| 5 | Impact of the Cyber Attack on the Housing Register | (Pages 17 - 54) |

Access and Information

Public Involvement and Recording

Public Attendance at the Town Hall for Meetings

Scrutiny meetings are held in public, rather than being public meetings. This means that whilst residents and press are welcome to attend, they can only ask questions at the discretion of the Chair. For further information relating to public access to information, please see Part 4 of the council's constitution, available at <https://hackney.gov.uk/council-business> or by contacting Governance Services (020 8356 3503)

Following the lifting of all Covid-19 restrictions by the Government and the Council updating its assessment of access to its buildings, the Town Hall is now open to the public and members of the public may attend meetings of the Council.

We recognise, however, that you may find it more convenient to observe the meeting via the live-stream facility, the link for which appears on the agenda front sheet.

We would ask that if you have either tested positive for Covid-19 or have any symptoms that you do not attend the meeting, but rather use the livestream facility. If this applies and you are attending the meeting to ask a question, make a deputation or present a petition then you may contact the Officer named at the beginning of the agenda and they will be able to make arrangements for the Chair of the meeting to ask the question, make the deputation or present the petition on your behalf.

The Council will continue to ensure that access to our meetings is in line with any Covid-19 restrictions that may be in force from time to time and also in line with public health advice. The latest general advice can be found here - <https://hackney.gov.uk/coronavirus-support>

Rights of Press and Public to Report on Meetings

Where a meeting of the Council and its committees are open to the public, the press and public are welcome to report on meetings of the Council and its committees, through any audio, visual or written methods and may use digital and social media providing they do not disturb the conduct of the meeting and providing that the person reporting or providing the commentary is present at the meeting.

Those wishing to film, photograph or audio record a meeting are asked to notify the Council's Monitoring Officer by noon on the day of the meeting, if possible, or any time prior to the start of the meeting or notify the Chair at the start of the meeting.

The Monitoring Officer, or the Chair of the meeting, may designate a set area from which all recording must take place at a meeting.

The Council will endeavour to provide reasonable space and seating to view, hear and record the meeting. If those intending to record a meeting require any other reasonable facilities, notice should be given to the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting and will only be provided if practicable to do so.

The Chair shall have discretion to regulate the behaviour of all those present recording a meeting in the interests of the efficient conduct of the meeting. Anyone acting in a disruptive manner may be required by the Chair to cease recording or may be excluded from the meeting.

Disruptive behaviour may include moving from any designated recording area; causing excessive noise; intrusive lighting; interrupting the meeting; or filming members of the public who have asked not to be filmed.

All those visually recording a meeting are requested to only focus on recording Councillors, officers and the public who are directly involved in the conduct of the meeting. The Chair of the meeting will ask any members of the public present if they have objections to being visually recorded. Those visually recording a meeting are asked to respect the wishes of those who do not wish to be filmed or photographed. Failure by someone recording a meeting to respect the wishes of those who do not wish to be filmed and photographed may result in the Chair instructing them to cease recording or in their exclusion from the meeting.

If a meeting passes a motion to exclude the press and public then in order to consider confidential or exempt information, all recording must cease, and all recording equipment must be removed from the meeting. The press and public are not permitted to use any means which might enable them to see or hear the proceedings whilst they are excluded from a meeting and confidential or exempt information is under consideration.

Providing oral commentary during a meeting is not permitted.

Advice to Members on Declaring Interests

Advice to Members on Declaring Interests

Hackney Council's Code of Conduct applies to all Members of the Council, the Mayor and co-opted Members.

This note is intended to provide general guidance for Members on declaring interests. However, you may need to obtain specific advice on whether you have an interest in a particular matter. If you need advice, you can contact:

- Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services
- the Legal Adviser to the Committee; or
- Governance Services.

If at all possible, you should try to identify any potential interest you may have before the meeting so that you and the person you ask for advice can fully consider all the circumstances before reaching a conclusion on what action you should take.

You will have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter if it:

- i. relates to an interest that you have already registered in Parts A and C of the Register of Pecuniary Interests of you or your spouse/civil partner, or anyone living with you as if they were your spouse/civil partner;
- ii. relates to an interest that should be registered in Parts A and C of the Register of Pecuniary Interests of your spouse/civil partner, or anyone living with you as if they were your spouse/civil partner, but you have not yet done so; or
- iii. affects your well-being or financial position or that of your spouse/civil partner, or anyone living with you as if they were your spouse/civil partner.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest in an item on the agenda you must:

- i. Declare the existence and nature of the interest (in relation to the relevant agenda item) as soon as it becomes apparent to you (subject to the rules regarding sensitive interests).
- ii. You must leave the meeting when the item in which you have an interest is being discussed. You cannot stay in the meeting whilst discussion of the item takes place, and you cannot vote on the matter. In addition, you must not seek to improperly influence the decision.
- iii. If you have, however, obtained dispensation from the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee you may remain in the meeting and participate in the

meeting. If dispensation has been granted it will stipulate the extent of your involvement, such as whether you can only be present to make representations, provide evidence or whether you are able to fully participate and vote on the matter in which you have a pecuniary interest.

Do you have any other non-pecuniary interest on any matter on the agenda which is being considered at the meeting?

You will have 'other non-pecuniary interest' in a matter if:

- i. It relates to an external body that you have been appointed to as a Member or in another capacity; or
- ii. It relates to an organisation or individual which you have actively engaged in supporting.

If you have other non-pecuniary interest in an item on the agenda you must:

- i. Declare the existence and nature of the interest (in relation to the relevant agenda item) as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- ii. You may remain in the meeting, participate in any discussion or vote provided that contractual, financial, consent, permission or licence matters are not under consideration relating to the item in which you have an interest.
- iii. If you have an interest in a contractual, financial, consent, permission, or licence matter under consideration, you must leave the meeting unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee. You cannot stay in the meeting whilst discussion of the item takes place, and you cannot vote on the matter. In addition, you must not seek to improperly influence the decision. Where members of the public are allowed to make representations, or to give evidence or answer questions about the matter you may, with the permission of the meeting, speak on a matter then leave the meeting. Once you have finished making your representation, you must leave the meeting whilst the matter is being discussed.
- iv. If you have been granted dispensation, in accordance with the Council's dispensation procedure you may remain in the meeting. If dispensation has been granted it will stipulate the extent of your involvement, such as whether you can only be present to make representations, provide evidence or whether you are able to fully participate and vote on the matter in which you have a non-pecuniary interest.

Further Information

Advice can be obtained from Dawn Carter-McDonald, Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services via email dawn.carter-mcdonald@hackney.gov.uk

Getting to the Town Hall

For a map of how to find the Town Hall, please visit the council's website <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/contact-us.htm> or contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer using the details provided on the front cover of this agenda.

Accessibility

There are public toilets available, with wheelchair access, on the ground floor of the Town Hall.

Induction loop facilities are available in the Assembly Halls and the Council Chamber. Access for people with mobility difficulties can be obtained through the ramp on the side to the main Town Hall entrance.

Further Information about the Commission

If you would like any more information about the Scrutiny Commission, including the membership details, meeting dates and previous reviews, please visit the website or use this QR Code (accessible via phone or tablet 'app')

<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/individual-scrutiny-commissions-living-in-hackney.htm>





<p>Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission</p> <p>12th September 2022</p> <p>Item 4 – Changes to the Housing Register and Lettings Policy</p>	<p>Item No</p> <p>4</p>
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Outline

In October 2021, the Council changed its lettings policy and how it allocates social housing.

The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission is keen to hear about how the lettings policy has affected residents since its implementation.

The lettings policy was last looked at by the Commission in December 2020 prior to the introduction of the new policy. The minutes of that meeting can be accessed [here](#).

Discussion

To look at the impact of Hackney Council's new Housing Register and Lettings Policy which came into effect in October 2021.

Particular focus to be given to:

- Advice and guidance in place for residents that no longer qualify for the register, and to those that face a long wait or that are unlikely to get housed
- The impact of the policy on prioritising residents in the greatest need and providing more predictable outcomes

Report(s)

To support this discussion the following reports and presentations were included for background information:

- Item 4a. Response from Housing Needs to key questions received in advance (**attached**)
- *Item 4a(i). Under Occupation Scheme - Insights Summary (attached)*

Invited Attendees

- Jennifer Wynter, Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
- Councillor Sade Etti, Mayoral Advisor for Housing Needs and Homelessness

Action

Members are asked to consider the reports and presentations and ask questions of those in attendance.

Response to Key Questions

Item 4. Changes to the Housing Register and Letting Policy

Housing Needs

What has been put in place to provide housing advice and guidance to residents that no longer qualify for the register, and to those that face a long wait or that are unlikely to get housed?

During the development, consultation and implementation phases of the new Allocations Policy a package of support was agreed for those residents no longer eligible. This included:

- Personalised, dedicated housing advice and support.
- Help finding suitable privately rented accommodation.
- An enhanced mutual exchange offer to help households already in permanent social housing to find and agree a transfer to alternative accommodation.
- Dedicated downsizing support for households looking for a smaller home.
- Mutual Exchange events

Demand for these services from those who have been removed from the register has been limited which indicates that many of those households previously on the register may have had no realistic expectation of securing social housing or may have found alternative solutions but remained on the register as a back up.

An example of what can be achieved if a tenant is willing to consider alternative housing happened shortly after the Housing register changes- Ms C, a Council Tenant, was living in a two bedroom, overcrowded property, needing two additional bedrooms. The tenant contacted the Benefits and Housing needs Service to see if we could help. We gave advice on affordability, suitability and information on how to find a privately rented property if she wished to prioritise this over her security of tenure. The tenant found a four bedroom privately rented semi detached house in Waltham Forest. We negotiated the rent down from £1875 to £1800 pcm which is above the Local Housing Allowance rate of £1725 pcm. The tenant is working and can afford the excess rent therefore we paid a landlord incentive of £3500 to help secure the property for the tenant and she released her Council property back to the Council for re-let.

There has been some interest in Mutual Exchange with residents supported in

	applying for schemes however for those residents seeking larger accommodation there is limited opportunity in borough.
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	<p>For those residents who are interested in downsizing from family accommodation, we have found that whilst there is no lack of demand, there is a lack of supply of the type of property that these residents will consider in the right location. Often the tenant will only consider a ground floor property with a garden in a very specific location, which either means that suitable properties do not exist or are utilised by those who have disabilities and need wheelchair accessible properties. It is not the case that the Council can simply facilitate swap moves between these tenants as their specific requirements outweigh their desire to move.</p>
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	<p>We will revisit this in light of increasing fuel bills and cost of living crisis, as this may cause some tenants to re-think their property requirements due to increased expenditure. This will link to the behavioural insights review we have carried out to help us better understand the potential barriers to considering moving (the write up and suggestions for follow on work can be found attached below: <i>Under Occupation Scheme - Insights Summary</i>).</p>
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How is resident voice and experience used to shape the service and how effective has this been in improving outcomes?

Whilst it is rather too early to demonstrate meaningful outcomes from the change to the Allocations Policy the service does not underestimate the value of residents' experiences of service delivery.

In delivering the new IT system the online form and application process has been developed using small groups of residents trialling iterations of the form. (See cyber attack below)

With a dedicated complaints team the service is able to monitor trends and to deliver service improvement regarding processes and messaging.

Recent presentations have been made to Advice Partners to share resident experiences and challenges and to encourage focus on achievable outcomes with clients.

Benefits and Housing Needs Service is funding a content designer post to work with the behavioural insights officer, to review all existing web site information to better inform residents on the availability of social housing and alternative options and to deliver a more client oriented content and messaging.

The service is also working to develop further support and information for residents, advocacy groups and colleagues in other Council services to help them understand the full range of options available. This includes case studies of residents who've successfully found better housing by exploring alternative options (including private rented options and out of borough moves) to long waits on the housing register.

What impact has the policy had on prioritising residents in the greatest need and providing more predictable outcomes?

The new allocations policy was intended to deliver a simpler and more equitable process to allocate social housing based on needs and circumstances. It can not, however, reduce waiting times as those are determined by available supply of housing - which continues to be extremely limited as a result of the housing crisis in Hackney.

There should be a clarity of purpose and delivery of the allocations policy such that residents have faith that the process is fair and transparent.

Whilst early in the delivery of the new scheme it is clear that residents with similar circumstances have the same opportunities as other residents no matter what the cause of their housing need.

This is particularly the case for applicants for whom the authority has accepted a statutory homelessness duty. In the past these residents would have been lower priority than those residents who had accommodation but qualified for the urgent band and would regularly see these urgent band applicants with much later band dates housed ahead of them.

The new scheme delivers more predictable outcomes as the majority join the register in Band B and will always have priority over residents with similar circumstances who joined the list at a later date.

Once the work to process the backlog of applications and changes caused by the cyber attack has been completed we will be able to give residents a new indication of their expected waiting time and the number of applicants ahead of them. With this information we will be able to have more open conversations with residents about their housing situation and what might be achieved more quickly to resolve immediate issues.

This is already being built into conversations with residents who approach the service as homeless or at risk of homelessness and through residents' interactions with neighbourhood housing officers. For applicants approaching medical needs we work

	with colleagues in Social Services to explore other solutions that can be delivered in their existing accommodation.
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	For those families with disabled children in particularly difficult circumstances, Children's Social Care, Housing Management and Benefits and Housing Needs Service operate a senior level multi disciplinary team meeting on a monthly basis to ensure that the appropriate attention and support is provided.
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Under Occupation Scheme

Insights and recommendations

Key insight: Limited stock of age-friendly homes and behavioural frictions in the downsizing process are the main barriers to successful downsizing.

Insights Summary

1. Barriers to generate demand
 - a. **Low incentive/compensation**
 - £750 per room given up
 - £500 if you move out on our own
 - If you're in arrears, what you owe to the council is taken out of the compensation
 - If you're a pensioner, the bedroom tax doesn't apply to you
 - b. **Psychological/contextual barriers**
 - Fear of change
 - Wish to stay in one's area and close to neighbours
 - Wish to have a spare bedroom for visitors
 - Family members do not want under occupying tenants to give up larger homes

2. Barriers to those who want to move to 1-bedroom
 - High expectations vs limited stock of age-friendly housing (e.g. ground floor, walk-in shower)
 - Long process: Referral → Visits/checks/verification → Acceptance letter → Bid → Move
 - In the bidding process, you're only moved to BAND C, no longer in the high priority band. Max two offers

3. Opportunities:
 - **Personalised support** is key to successful rehousing of older social tenants
 - Works well if there is greater consideration of **individual tenants' circumstance and preferences** to which this can be reconciled with available resources
 - Looking **beyond Hackney** enabled several moves that received positive feedback (e.g. Seaside & Country Homes)
 - **Practical support** (e.g. arranging for a removal company) and **ongoing communication** about the process improved the rehousing experience
 - Leverage **community events (e.g. Winter Warmer)** to promote downsizing scheme and mutual exchange. Most people hear about housing schemes through word-of-mouth

Key recommendation: A dedicated housing navigator who can provide personalised support and direct offers (where applicable) to those who are motivated to move into a smaller property that better meets their current needs.

Recommended next steps

1. **Understand our current age-friendly stock:** Pull together a list of 1-bedroom housing that is currently available and mark which ones meet our age-friendly criteria (e.g accessible flats that are on the ground or first floor)
2. **Create a list of residents who are eligible** for the under occupation scheme. We can prioritise those who are in 4-5 bedroom housing and/or have expressed interest in downsizing. Helen referenced a list of residents who requested to downsize in the past that needs reviewing
3. **Create a secondment role to proactively reach out to priority residents:** Since we already have a [business case](#) in place, Zoe had a great idea of creating a secondment where a downsizing 'housing navigator' can work alongside Link Workers.
4. **Provide direct offers where possible:** Since downsizing only puts you in Band C, we're likely to lose people in the system. Helen came up with a brilliant suggestion of providing direct offers where possible to speed up the process. She shared an excellent case study where a direct offer helped a resident downsize in 2 months. We can also introduce other relevant schemes such as mutual exchange or properties in the private rental sector.
5. **Iterate our comms as we go:** A key insight from the research is that the financial incentive was not always the main driver for people to downsize. If we do need to generate demand, I suggest broadening our comms so we can get people to speak to the navigator (see mockup below). The navigator can work out what motivates the resident and can put together a personalised housing action plan. We can adapt our comms as we go based on the learnings from the pilot.



Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission 12th September 2022 Item 5 – Impact of the Cyber Attack on the Housing Register	Item No 5
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Outline

The cyber attack on Hackney Council in October 2020 left many systems unavailable for Council staff to deliver services, and staff have continued to work through backlogs of work that built up when systems were unavailable since.

The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission is keen to hear about how the cyber attack has affected residents on the housing register and whether the service has returned to business as usual.

Discussion

To look at Hackney Council's efforts to mitigate the impact of the 2020 cyber attack on Hackney Council's housing register.

Particular focus to be given to:

- The impact of the cyber attack on the housing register, and what has been put in place to mitigate the risks to residents in need

Report(s)

To support this discussion the following reports and presentations were included for background information:

- 5a. Response from Housing Needs to key questions received in advance (**attached**)
- 5a(i). Copy of Member Update on Housing Register (**attached**)
- 5a(ii). Copy of Member Update on New Lettings Policy (**attached**)

Invited Attendees

- Jennifer Wynter, Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
- Councillor Sade Etti, Mayoral Advisor for Housing Needs and Homelessness

Action

Members are asked to consider the reports and presentations and ask questions of those in attendance. Page 17

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Response to Key Questions

Item 5. Impact of the Cyber Attack on the Housing Register

Housing Needs

What impact has the cyber attack had on the housing register, and what has been put in place to mitigate the risks to residents in need?

Impact of the Cyber attack -

Loss of the old Universal Housing system - At the time of the cyber attack all applicants already assessed and eligible for the housing register with a bidding number were still able to bid for advertised properties. The advertising and bidding process is managed through a separate IT system hosted by LB Newham (Novalet) which remained unaffected by our cyber attack.

However the loss of Universal Housing removed the ability to process new applications to the register and changes in circumstances for existing applicants. With waiting times of many years the immediate impact on residents of this has been minimal as those applications / changes would have had a banding date that placed the residents behind other residents who were already on the housing register. There has, however, been a very understandable sense of frustration for residents waiting to have applications / changes processed as residents place great value on being able to bid, even if their prospects of making a successful bid are minimal.

While the work to rebuild our systems has been taking place the service has been collecting resident information for those who wish to apply and those who have had changes so that they could be directed to the appropriate process as soon as they became available (details below).

For existing applicants who have had a change in circumstances and where they have a band date old enough to put them near to successful bidding it has been possible to make manual changes to Novalet that would allow them to bid for appropriately sized property. As a manual process it would not be practical or desirable to intervene in this way for all cases.

The absence of an IT system has resulted in a backlog of applications, assessments and changes to process, these are detailed in the work plan below. The service is ensuring that residents are assigned banding dates based on when they approached the Council

	<p>to make an application / advise of updates - this will ensure that all residents have the correct priority on the housing register and are not disadvantaged.</p>
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Development of a replacement IT system -

The Service is developing an in-house IT system to manage the Housing Register, this will include a front facing online form and back office processing and administration.

Online application form:

- Focused on making the resident-facing form easy to understand and complete to encourage self-service, simplifying language and re-using the Hackney design system.
- Reduced the number of questions and made applicants aware up front of expected waiting times and other housing options. Clear signposting towards support throughout the form.
- Designed for different genders, we added 'prefer to self-describe' to make the design more inclusive and this has been added to the Council's design library.

On the staff side, we have developed an administration tool to view, assign and manage applications. Officers can see applications that are in progress or submitted and view relevant evidence linked to the application. They can notify residents via email of the assessment decision and generate bidding numbers.

Future functionality developments will enable online change of circumstances, annual reviews, view only, recovering the Housing Register waiting time tool, and track bedroom need updates based on age changes, which will help ensure applications are kept up to date.

Work plan - With the introduction of the new Allocations Policy in October 2021 the Benefits and Housing Needs Service agreed a three phase work plan from October 2021. Delays in replacing Universal Housing have restricted work on phase one but this is now fully underway. The Service prioritises those households that would be negatively impacted ie those where the change is one which will shorten their waiting time or they are very close to successfully bidding for a property.

	Phase One
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- **Reserve band applicants not eligible for the new register** - received 110 enquiries from residents asking for a reconsideration, of these 67 applicants had changes that meant they qualified under the new rules.
- **General band applicants not eligible for the new register** - received 363 enquiries from residents asking for a reconsideration, of these 80 applicants had changes that meant they qualified under the new rules. 106 applicants are yet to complete the reapplication process.
- **New Applicants** - received 795 requests to join the Housing Register since October 2020. 190 households have been invited to complete an online application and 117 of these have been accepted. The service is planning to invite all new applicants to complete the registration process by the end of this calendar year.
 - **Accepted Homeless Cases** - 1024 households have been accepted as homeless since October 2020 and are eligible to join the housing register. 351 have been registered, 673 remain to be processed (this is expected to complete by the end of the calendar year). Single people have been prioritised as the waiting time is shorter for one bedroom properties.
- **Reported changes in circumstances** - 684 households have experienced a change in circumstances that they have reported and may change their bidding needs. Those who are urgent and may be at risk of being disadvantaged have been prioritised.

Phase Two - Review of existing applicants

- Applicant circumstances change over time but are frequently unreported. To ensure the continued accuracy of household details and eligibility Phase two will review approximately 1000 applications of more complex cases involving significant medical assessments, overcrowding, social need and under occupation.

Phase Three - Further review and business as usual

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Applications from residents over 55 and eligible for sheltered or older persons accommodation and those with low level medical need specifically will be reviewed.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Business as usual will see regular planned reviews of all applications to maintain the accuracy and integrity of the housing register. <p>The anxiety caused to residents by the impacts of the cyber attack on processing times has resulted in high levels of calls to the Council's contact centre. This is compounded by additional demand caused by the housing crisis and cost of living emergency. To mitigate this and minimise the waiting times for people with the most urgent cases, the Council's housing advice contact number has now been split into four separate queues: Homelessness, Temporary Accommodation, Choice Based Lettings and Housing Advice with the homelessness queue prioritised. Additional staff have also been employed and trained to help us provide the best possible service to residents needing housing support and advice.</p> <p>Previous member updates on this topic can be found attached below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Housing Register Member Briefing● New Lettings Policy Members Briefing - Housing Register Transition
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Hackney Council

Members briefing
Housing Register Software

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4. What we've built
5. The benefits of a new tool
6. What we want to track and why
7. Next steps

A new housing register solution that aligns to Hackney's new allocations scheme is now live

1. An introduction

2. The challenges
3. The opportunity
4. What we've built
5. The benefits of a new tool
6. What we want to track and why
7. Next steps

Background

We have created a simpler, more transparent housing register, better suited to the situation in Hackney today. At a time of increasing demand and reduced supply, the Council must ensure that the limited stock of social housing that becomes available goes to those in greatest need while also investing in advice and support for all those unlikely to access a home through the housing register.

Vision

People wanting to join the housing register can understand the full range of options available to them and their likelihood of securing social housing. It is simple to join for people who qualify, minimises failure demand, is easy to administer, sufficiently open and gives all stakeholders confidence in the fairness of the process. The underlying applications are secure, reliable and adaptable to the changing needs of users.

Outcomes we're driving through the new system:

- Empathic – prioritising people with the greatest need
- Simple – easier to apply and guides people to the right outcome
- Robust – generates less confusion and misunderstanding
- Fairer – provides predictable outcomes
- Clearer – changing the conversation about what's possible

Some of the main challenges we were facing

1. An introduction

2. The challenges

3. The opportunity

4. What we've built

5. The benefits of a new

to go

6. What we want to track

and why

7. Next steps

There is a severe shortage of social housing in Hackney, meaning we can not provide a social housing property to the vast majority of people who would like one

In early 2021 there were 13,000 people on the housing register in Hackney. **Last year fewer than 400 families moved into social housing** and most people without special circumstances would be waiting **for over 20 years** for social housing.

Homeless households were facing estimated waiting times **four or more times longer** than households with similar circumstances in the urgent band.

Of households in the register in 2020 **over one third had significant housing needs**, double the proportion in 2015. More and more of these households are presenting with multiple and complex needs.

Unable to focus on the most complex and vulnerable cases

Due to the quantities of people on the housing register and because of the large amount of administrative work, our staff were unable to focus on **the most complex and vulnerable cases which often need more support to secure a stable housing option.**

Compromised systems

In October 2020, the council endured the cyber-attack which resulted in many of our internally hosted systems being unavailable **including the old housing register (Universal Housing).**

The opportunity

The Council recognised the need to update the Social Housing Lettings Policy, moving from 5 bands to 3 bands **to provide a clearer system for eligible residents** and support those most vulnerable residents to find settled accommodation.

And we wanted to build a tool that would;

- allow residents **to self-serve where possible**
- incorporate logic and automation where we could **in order to gain efficiencies and minimise the administrative workload**

1. An introduction

2. The challenges

3. The opportunity

4. What we've built

5. The benefits of a new

tool

6. What we want to track

and why

7. Next steps

The tool : resident facing form

We focused on making the resident-facing form easy to understand and complete to encourage self-service, **simplifying language and re-using the Hackney design system.**

We reduced the number of questions and **made applicants aware up front of expected waiting times and other housing options.** There is also clear signposting towards support throughout the form.

A small but notable change that was introduced was **designing for different genders,** we added 'prefer to self-describe' to make the design more inclusive and this has been added to Council's design library.

The screenshot shows the 'Address history' section of the Hackney Housing Register application. The header includes the Hackney logo and 'Housing Register application'. The user is identified as 'Joe Bloggs'. The breadcrumb trail is 'People > Joe Bloggs > Address history'. The main heading is 'Address history'. Under 'Current address', there is a link 'Help with home address' and a text box explaining that if the user has no fixed abode or is sofa surfing, they should use the address where they sleep for the majority of the week, with a link to 'contact a housing officer'. Below this is a 'Postcode' input field and a 'Find address' button. The 'Time at address' section includes an example '01 03' and input fields for 'Years' and 'Months'.

Application complete

Your reference:
HDJ2123F

A confirmation email has
been sent to
joe.bloggs@gmail.com

What happens next

Application submitted

Thursday 29 April 2021

Application review

We aim to review applications
within two weeks.

Medical checks

If you have provided information
about medical conditions for
people in your application, these
will be assessed by a specialist.

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The tool : admin interface

The decision to prioritise the resident experience means the staff experience is still being developed whilst live.

On the staff side, we developed an administration tool to view, assign and manage applications.

Officers can **see applications that are in progress or submitted and view relevant evidence** linked to the application. They can notify residents via email of the assessment decision and generate bidding numbers.

We're currently building functionality to **track bedroom need updates based on age changes**, which will help ensure applications are kept up to date.

The screenshot displays the 'View application' page for Mr Joe Bloggs (+2 others) in the Hackney Housing Register system. The page is divided into several sections:

- Header:** Hackney HOUSING REGISTER, Firstname Surname, Sign out
- Navigation:** < Back to worktray
- Application Title:** View application Mr Joe Bloggs (+2 others) with a 'View documents' button.
- Tabs:** Household overview (selected), Notes and history, Actions
- Snapshot:** There are 3 people in this application. They are currently living with friends or family in a two bedroom flat (third floor) with 4 other people in E8 1DY. 2 people in this application have a stated medical need.
- Case details:** Application reference: 21006-34525, Status: Awaiting assessment (Change), Application date: 28 May 2021, Assigned to: Select an option.
- Main applicant:** Mr Joe Bloggs, Applicant, Male, 13/12/90 (age 30), Medical need: 07701234567, joe.bloggs@gmail.com, To do: Open.
- Other household members:** Ms Josie Bloggs, Partner, Female, 18/02/93 (age 28), To do: Open; Mx Junior Bloggs, Child, Non binary, 10/05/09 (age 12), Medical need, To do: Open.

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Hackney Housing Register application Maya [Sign out](#)

What to expect

Based on the information you have provided about who you want to move with, you may be able to apply for a **2 bedroom** property.

The average waiting time for a 2 bedroom property is **11 years**.

Next, you will need to complete more information to determine if you qualify to join the housing register.

[Save and continue](#)

[Cancel this application](#)

Help

If you need help completing this form, please contact us quoting your **application reference E4ED1F3218** and we will assist you.

Hackney Housing Register application Jane [Sign out](#)

[Application](#) > Jane

Complete information for:
Jane Doe

Identity

[Personal details](#) Completed

[Immigration status](#) To do

Health

Medical needs Can't start yet

Living situation

Residential status Can't start yet

Address history Can't start yet

Current accommodation Can't start yet

Your situation Can't start yet

Demo

We will demo two separate user journeys, but there are of course many variations and different paths residents can take when filling out the form due to the logic that's been built into the questions.

We will demo;

- 1) What happens when a user is **successful** in their application (i.e. they qualify and receive information on **next steps**). Our persona for this demo will be from the Private Rental Sector
- 2) What happens when a user is **unsuccessful** in their application (i.e. what messaging and **alternative support is offered**). We will use the example of a council tenant to demonstrate this alternative.

Reflections on the tool

We first launched the tool with a small cohort of residents on the **25th October 2021** and have since been **capturing feedback** from residents and from the Housing Register Officers.

We have received overall positive feedback from both audiences, and have **captured any improvement and enhancement opportunities for the tool**. We have also been able **to iterate on a handful** of the issues raised.

It is however worth noting that **we launched this tool as a working *minimum viable product*** and it is not perfect. The Housing Register Officers have been working really hard to learn how to use the tool, have helped test it and log any unexpected issues or possible improvements and have been patient bridging any gaps that occur as a result of launching a new digital tool.

"The design feels familiar, like applying for a covid test or doing my taxes. I'm used to the questions and format so can zip through it. Great!" - Resident

"The snapshot really helpful in quickly building a picture of the household and their need, saves me time having to go back and forth..." - Housing Register Officer

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We engaged residents and staff to design and test the new form

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We involved service users through the design process, conducting **19 resident sessions** and **14 Hackney staff sessions** with housing register and customer service officers, managers and medical officers.

We iteratively tested the housing register **with a diverse group** of residents (different demographics, digital literacy, housing and accessibility needs) to check flow, design, language, usability of the form, and optimise design for different accessibility needs.

The image is a composite of three parts. The top left shows a video call with two participants; the person on the left has a yellow smiley face overlaid on their face. The top right shows a smartphone displaying the 'Hackney Housing Register' app. The bottom part shows a desktop screen with a form titled 'Apply to the Housing Register'. The form includes sections for 'What to expect', 'What documents you'll need to provide', and 'What happens afterwards?'. The desktop taskbar at the bottom shows the date as 10:15 on 14/03/2021.

Hackney Housing Register

Application complete

Your reference: HDJ2123F

We have sent a confirmation email to joe.bloggs123@email.com

What happens next

- Application submitted
Thursday 29 April 2021
- Application review
We aim to review applications within 20 working days.

Apply to the Housing Register

What to expect

It may take up to one hour to complete your application. You will need to supply personal details for each person in your application. You can save your progress and return to your application within 30 days before submitting.

What documents you'll need to provide

You will need to upload proof of identity, address, income, any savings, and benefits for each person in your application. You may need to supply additional documentation based on your circumstances.

What happens afterwards?

What we want to track and why

Indicators of success

- **Number and characteristics of residents being added to the register** in comparison with before so that we can ensure those in the greatest need are supported into social housing
- **Increase in the proportion of residents finding housing** through other avenues e.g. PRS / number of other grants provided so that we can prevent homelessness and help with a realistic housing aim
- **Increase support for complex cases with medical conditions** so that they receive a tailored experience
- **Increased number of residents self-serving** so that staff can spend time delivering support to those who need it most (those who can, do)

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How Might We . . .

1. Support residents who feel more confident at accessing the service online to do more (eg. change of circumstances)
2. Reduce failure demand by making the journey more transparent (eg. recovering the waiting time tool)
3. Make the process more efficient (eg. integrating with Single View)

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Hackney Council

Members briefing
Lettings Policy -
Housing Register Transition

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A new housing register solution that aligns to Hackney's new allocations scheme is now live

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Background

We have created a simpler, more transparent housing register, better suited to the situation in Hackney today. At a time of increasing demand and reduced supply, the Council must ensure that the limited stock of social housing that becomes available goes to those in greatest need while also investing in advice and support for all those unlikely to access a home through the housing register.

Vision

People wanting to join the housing register can understand the full range of options available to them and their likelihood of securing social housing. It is simple to join for people who qualify, minimises failure demand, is easy to administer, sufficiently open and gives all stakeholders confidence in the fairness of the process. The underlying applications are secure, reliable and adaptable to the changing needs of users.

Outcomes we're driving through the new system:

- Empathic – prioritising people with the greatest need
- Simple – easier to apply and guides people to the right outcome
- Robust – generates less confusion and misunderstanding
- Fairer – provides predictable outcomes
- Clearer – changing the conversation about what's possible

Some of the main challenges we were facing

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There is a severe shortage of social housing in Hackney, meaning we can not provide a social housing property to the vast majority of people who would like one

In early 2021 there were 13,000 people on the housing register in Hackney. **During 2019/20 only 409 properties became available for allocation** and most people without special circumstances would be waiting **for over 20 years** for social housing.

Homeless households were facing estimated waiting times **four or more times longer** than households with similar circumstances in the urgent band.

Of households in the register in 2020 **over one third had significant housing needs**, double the proportion in 2015. More and more of these households are presenting with multiple and complex needs.

Unable to focus on the most complex and vulnerable cases

Due to the quantities of people on the housing register and because of the large amount of administrative work, our staff were unable to focus on **the most complex and vulnerable cases which often need more support to secure a stable housing option.**

Compromised systems

In October 2020, the council endured the cyber-attack which resulted in many of our internally hosted systems being unavailable **including the old housing register (Universal Housing).**

The opportunity

The Council recognised the need to update the Social Housing Lettings Policy, moving from 5 bands to 3 bands **to provide a clearer system for eligible residents** and support those most vulnerable residents to find settled accommodation.

We are developing a tool that will;

- allow residents **to self-serve where possible**
- incorporate logic and automation where we could **in order to gain efficiencies and minimise the administrative workload**

In next weeks briefing we will give you a run down of the new software

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Transition Process

- Those residents previously in the urgent, priority and homeless bands will retain eligibility under the new scheme as will households previously in the General Band where there is an assessed medical need or overcrowding in a one bedroom property.
- Over 55s will remain eligible to bid for older persons accommodation, and households with children approaching a relevant age will remain on the register in a transitional band.

New Band	Description	Number of households (approx) *	
Band B	Applicants with a significant housing need - accepted homeless, overcrowded by 2 rooms or more, significant medical need/condition, significant social priority	5176 (includes 501 accepted homeless cases pending issue of bidding number)	Applicants eligible under urgent, priority or homeless band in previous scheme.
Band C	Medical need, condition not exacerbated by housing, one room overcrowded. social need	2337	
Transition	Applicants with children approaching significant birthday which brings about overcrowding by 2 or more rooms		Refers only to existing applicants on the register at 30/09/21
Over 55s - Band C	Applicant eligible for older persons accommodation		Applicants only eligible to bid for age related properties.

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The transition process - Reserve and General Band Households

- Letters have been dispatched to all residents in the **reserve band** who no longer qualify under the new scheme. A copy of the letter can be found [here](#). 2901 households fall into this category and have now had their bidding account suspended.
- Letters have been dispatched to 2313 **general band** households who no longer qualify under the new scheme and a copy of the letter is [here](#). Those households who still qualify because of their medical condition (392) or overcrowding in small properties (1341) have been identified separately.
- The letters included a link to an [online form](#) for residents to report a change in circumstance if they believed they are eligible and qualify under the new scheme and offered the opportunity to provide details of relevant changes and to seek individual advice about securing appropriate settled accommodation.
- The service is working on all forms received and applicants who qualify through this route will be awarded an appropriate band and effective date based on the change in circumstance, they will not have been disadvantaged by the cyber attack or policy change.
- The service has been scheduling appointments and conducting interviews with those residents who have asked for further support and advice.
- 620 households have been identified as moved away and not notified the Council of their change ie 5% to date and increasing as the transition process continues

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The transition process - Phase 1 New applications

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- Applications to join the housing register = 442
- Reported changes in circumstances = 306
- Households requested to complete a health form = 75
- Homeless accepted cases to be allocated a bidding number = 602
- Homeless residents reporting a change in circumstances = 110
- Reviews = 5

The transition process - Phase 2 Band B Re - registering process

Phase 2 will address the need to check the circumstances of those households that transfer to the new register and will focus on:

- Review and registering of under occupiers = 260
- Review and registering of households with significant medical needs = 120
- Review and registering of overcrowded households = 399
- Review and registering of households with a significant social need (e.g Domestic Abuse, Gang Related) = 67
- Review and registering of Lease Expiry/Council Interest (Quota)/Decants (Temporary or Permanent) = 199

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The Transition Process - Phase 3 Band C Re - registering process

Phase Three will review the cases in Band C of the new scheme:

- Households with residents over 55 eligible for older persons housing/dwellings - Housing Register (859)
- Review as reassessment of households with a lower level medical need (e.g. extra bedroom) - Medical Team (750)

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Tailored Housing Advice

- Medical Team & Housing Register Team
- Specific advice based on Tenure type and individual circumstances
- 12 ways into housing for Council Tenants
- Registered Providers giving advice direct to affected residents and promoting mutual exchange
- Housing Advice appointments booked for private tenants
- Early advice for new applicants to explore quicker solutions for housing needs
- Promotion of alternate schemes Homeswapper, Homefinders, Seaside and Country Homes. 10 moves via SSCH
- Mutual Exchange event for Council and Housing Association tenants
- Mutual Exchange is a way for social housing tenants to swap tenancies so that they can move, normally into the right sized house. 172 MEX swaps completed during 2019/20 & 2020/21
- **4 way** swap completed by Housing and three other Landlords. Hackney to Birmingham to Pontypridd to Great Yarmouth to Hackney.....588 miles.

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Tailored Housing Advice

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Would you like to swap homes with another social housing tenant?



Don't miss our Home Swap virtual event on **Saturday 5 March from 10.30am-12.00pm**

Swapping homes is known as 'Mutual Exchange'. Hundreds of Hackney residents have already done this. It's a nationwide scheme; you can apply to exchange properties with other council tenants in Hackney or another council, housing association or other provider.

It's suitable for those living in social housing and who either wish to:

- Move to a bigger property
- Downsize
- Move to another area outside or inside Hackney.

To take part, you will need to be a social housing tenant with a secure or assured tenancy. You must also have no rent arrears or live notices of seeking possession relating to your tenancy. The Mutual Exchange process will also require you to have access to the internet.



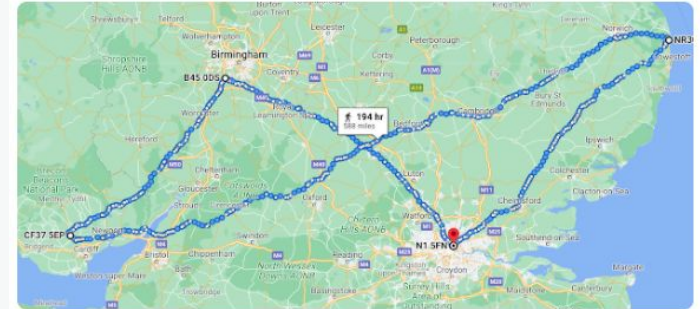
Mutual Exchange but turned up to 11

Mutual Exchange is a way for social housing Residents to swap tenancies so that they can move, normally into the right sized house.

Well, with new technology and the pressure on social housing these swaps can become very complicated! Check out the **4 way** swap completed by Damian Donnelly and three other Landlords below. Hackney to Birmingham to Pontypridd to Great Yarmouth to Hackney.....588 miles.

Well done to **+Damian Donnelly** and the landlords but most importantly to the Residents for making it happen!

#residents #MutualExchange #iwouldwalk500miles



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- September 2022 - Report to members:
 - Evaluation of policy intent
 - EQIA - outcomes of Lettings Policy change
 - Update on detailed reporting from Housing Register
 - Progress of case reviews

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