

**London Borough of Hackney  
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2021/22  
Thursday 24 February 2022**

Minutes of the proceedings of  
the Living in Hackney Scrutiny  
Commission held at  
Hackney Town Hall, Mare  
Street, London E8 1EA

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<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Councillor Sharon Patrick</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance:</b>	<b>Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ian Rathbone, Cllr Penny Wrout, Cllr Sophie Conway and Cllr Lynne Troughton</b>
<b>Connecting virtually:</b>	<b>Cllr Clare Joseph, Cllr Soraya Adejare and Cllr Sarah Young</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Ajay Chauhan</b>
<b>Officers In Attendance:</b>	<b>Jacquie Burke (Group Director for Children &amp; Education), Diane Benjamin (Director of Children's Social Care), James Goddard (Interim Director of Regeneration), Jennifer Wynter (Head of Benefits &amp; Housing Needs), Laura Bleaney (Head of Corporate Parenting), Claudia Hillaire (Head of Care Leavers), Ross Hatful (Legislation, Strategy &amp; Projects Officer), Arto Maatrtta (Team Manager Housing Needs), Marcia Facey (Operations Manager, Housing Needs) and Benjamin Norton (Hackney Tomorrow)</b>
<b>Other People in Attendance:</b>	<b>Cllr Antoinette Bramble (Cabinet member for Children, Education &amp; Children's Social Care), Cllr Sade Etti (Cabinet Member for Housing Needs), Sophie Konradsen (LB Lambeth) and Brenda Amisi-Hutchinson (LB Islington). Five young care leavers</b>
<b>Members of the Public:</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	<b>Tracey Anderson</b> <b>☎ 020 8356 3312</b> <b>✉ <a href="mailto:tracey.anderson@hackney.gov.uk">tracey.anderson@hackney.gov.uk</a></b>

## **Councillor Sharon Patrick in the Chair**

### **Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the etiquette for the meeting. It was noted that this was a joint meeting of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission and the Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission and would be jointly chaired by Cllr Sharon Patrick and Cllr Sophie Conway.

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the etiquette for the meeting. It was noted that this was a joint meeting of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission and the Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission and would be jointly chaired by Cllr Sharon Patrick and Cllr Sophie Conway.

1.1 Apologies for absence from Cllr Ajay Chauhan.

### **2 Urgent Items / Order of Business**

2.1 There were no urgent items, and the agenda was as agreed and published.

### **3 Declaration of Interest**

2.1 There were no urgent items, and the agenda was as agreed and published.

### **4 Housing Support for Care Leavers**

4.1 The aim of this scrutiny session was to review the housing support and accommodation options available to care leavers in Hackney. This was a joint session of both Living in Hackney and Children & Young People Scrutiny Commissions, reflecting that this issue encompasses children's social care, the council's corporate parenting responsibility, housing needs, housing strategy and housing supply.

4.2 The Commissions were assisted by the contributions of local officers and external guests from Lambeth and Islington, and local care leavers. It was noted that a number of reports had been submitted to the Commissions which would also be used as evidence (enclosed within the report pack). After this session, Commission members would reflect on all the evidence received and make recommendations to improve housing support to care leavers for relevant Cabinet members to consider.

#### Cabinet member introduction

4.3 The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care thanked young people for contributing to the development of the new housing pathway for care leavers which it was hoped would provide better accommodation and housing support. Despite these improvements, the Cabinet member noted that care leavers still had significant anxieties about their accommodation options not only in the short-term, but also for the medium and longer-term as they reached the ages

of 21 and 25. Whilst 18 social let properties were made available for care leavers each year, there were far more care leavers who would benefit from this opportunity. The Cabinet member welcomed this review as it underlined the importance of joined-up support from across the Council and hoped it would develop challenging and innovative recommendations to improve housing support for care leavers.

### Care Leavers in Hackney

4.4 Prior to this meeting, it was noted that the Chair and Vice Chairs of both Commissions had conducted a focus group with 10 young care leavers to understand the nature and level of housing support that they received. An analysis of the key themes to emerge from the focus group is contained in the agenda pack. The Chair thanked young people for attending the focus group and this session, as it was critically important that members understood the lived experience of care leavers in relation to the housing support they received.

4.5 In addition, ahead of the meeting the Chair and Vice Chairs of both commissions undertook a site visit to semi-independent accommodation used to support young people leaving care. This also allowed the opportunity for members to speak to support staff, care leavers and other young people about how housing needs were being met locally.

4.6 Care leavers present were asked to briefly introduce themselves and describe their current housing situation and any key issues they had faced or were likely to face in the future about their accommodation. Key issues raised included the following:

- (CL1) lived and attended University outside of London and was aware that they would unlikely to be able to access social housing on their return to Hackney given the limited supply available. The care leaver also had concerns around the affordability of housing within the private rented sector in Hackney, and whether they could actually afford to return.
- (CL2) lived in a housing association property. The main issue for this care leaver was that they were given no choice of social rent, and therefore had to take a property on an estate where she grew up and had associated trauma. The care leaver had to remain in situ as there were no other options to move within Hackney.
- (CL3) was 18 and lived in supported accommodation. The care leaver was concerned that there would be no social let properties available through the quota and that they may be left homeless when they reach the age of 21.
- (CL4) was aged 20 with a baby son and was currently living in Tower Hamlets in the private rented sector. The house was not suitable as it was too small for a young mother with a baby.

### Questions from the Commission

4.7 How involved have care leavers felt in decisions made about their housing situation?

- (CL1) Care leavers do not get much say in their housing. Care leavers were required to take what was offered, and what was available was felt to be expensive. Even if care leavers were able to get an offer of social housing through the quota, one direct offer was made and therefore could not be refused. If you care leavers didn't accept that, then it was the

homelessness route. So either way, care leavers felt that there was limited choice in where they could live.

- (CL2) There was very little choice of supported accommodation, it was either this accommodation offered, someone's couch or the streets.
- (CL3) Care leaver wasn't given a choice about supported accommodation offered, but they still made me come and see it before they moved in.

4.8 What happens to young care leavers' social network of friends and family when they are required to leave care or move?

- (CL1) When young people are in care, they can be moved often and sometimes be placed far away from Hackney, both of which can be problematic for maintaining contact with friends and family.
- (CL2) Care leaver's initial placement was outside of the borough which was hard, but it was better now they were back in the borough as they were closer to the people that they knew and cared about them;
- (CL3) Was initially in a placement near Islington which was not too far and friends and an ex-foster carer could visit relatively easily. But after being moved to Tower Hamlets, it was too far for such contacts to visit. Even the family nurse (to support her baby) now does on-line check-ups as it's too far for her to travel and to find somewhere to park is difficult.

4.9 What one thing could be changed to improve your transition to independence as a care leaver?

- (CL1) Foster carers need more support to help children transition from care to independence.
- (CL2) Care leavers need greater certainty as many live with a lot of anxiety about their future, particularly their housing situation. Being homeless is at the back of young peoples' minds as they know there will be greater uncertainty when they leave care or when they turn 18 or 21.
- (CL3) For now, what would really help is more housing options both in and out of Hackney.

4.10 What has been the most significant challenge you've faced in your transition from care? How well have you been supported by the Council (as your corporate parent) in this process?

- (CL1) The most difficult part of leaving care transition was moving from supported accommodation at age 18. I really liked the accommodation and it was difficult to move on from that, because at pre-18, I did not have to pay any bills and everything was covered, but now in post 18 accommodation I now have to pay bills, not just rent, but gas and electric, wifi and other household bills. Social services did try and help me and supported me in doing an income and expenditure analysis, which was helpful, but practically, just not enough.
- (CL2) My biggest challenge will be when I leave university as I will be over 21 and I will not be entitled to any social housing in the borough. This has not even been tackled by my social worker, but when I get to the point, I am not sure who I will need to go to to help figure out my options. If I return to Hackney, I am not sure if I will be able to afford to live there as I will probably be in private rented accommodation and that's so expensive.
- (CL3) I was told I would not be here for more than 6 months as the place is small for me and my baby, but I am past that time now and I don't know what is coming next. I know that they are going to refer me to The

Greenhouse, but I don't know when. I really don't know what my situation is at the moment.

4.11 What advice was provided to young care leavers who were considering going to university or taking up employment in respect of their housing options and the affordability of available options?

- (CL1) I had an offer to go university but my social worker let me know that housing options would be limited when I returned (most likely none) which deterred me from going. There was also the confusion as to where I would live during university recess during the summer and at Easter. I still want to go to university but I need to find another route which does not lead to homelessness.
- (CL2) I was going to apply to work, but was advised that I could not work more than 16 hours as this would impact on my housing.
- (CL3) I did explore housing options with my social worker before I came to university, but as it was unlikely I would get social housing in Hackney, I decided to go to university. The cost of accommodation here (south west) is also expensive and I am struggling to cover costs here. I am lucky that I have a Staying Put agreement which means that I can come back during the holidays. I feel a little cheated by the system in that I will not get social housing if I return to London and the cost of housing here is also prohibitive. So there are limited options for me.
- (CL4) It was something that I thought about and it was a deterrent to go to university because I knew when I got back things would not be better. I already had supported accommodation when I first considered going to university and I didn't want to lose this. I ended up going to university in London which helped. Before I went to university, I was worried about taking up work as the rent for the supported accommodation was very high and I was concerned about being stuck in the benefit trap of not being able to afford that on the wage I would be earning. Where the prices are so high it is a deterrent, especially when you have such limited choice.

4.12 The focus group highlighted the contrasting levels of housing support that care leavers received from their social workers. How timely and effective has housing support been for care leavers and is there anything that they have not been able to help you with?

- (CL1) There are so many complex and interrelated issues that it's unreasonable to expect the social worker to advise on everything for care leavers, but perhaps it might be useful to recruit someone else to the team who can provide more specialist advice, such as around housing and Universal Credit and benefit entitlement, which is pretty complex for care leavers post 18. Although there are leaflets available, every care leaver's situation is different and they may have different needs and circumstances which may require more specific or expert information and advice.
- (CL2) There was a need for improved access to mental health and counselling services for care leavers, in particular that services were confidential and were not linked to their social services record.

4.13 What housing advice has been provided by social workers to support care leavers as they approach the age of 21?

- (CL1) I just got told to prepare for housing in the private sector as the social housing quota changes each year.

- (CL2) Very similar to the previous contributor, there's very few opportunities for a social let.
- (CL3) I can stay here in social housing so this is not an issue.

4.14 What mental health support do care leavers have in respect of transition at 18 and 21 years old? Do young people feel comfortable asking for help and what is the support like when you get it?

- (CL1) Accessing support can be problematic as you have to go through various panels to get help for mental health. I have not had any issues asking for help, but I know others might not be so lucky.
- (CL2) It is nerve racking as 21 approaches because it's always on your mind. I am getting closer and closer to that time. I think you need to be allocated to social housing quota much earlier, because there is no time to prepare for other things if you don't. The private sector requires large deposits before you even move in of up to £3000 and I don't know an 21 year old has access to that money.
- I know that the care leavers housing quota is low in relation to the need, but we should not have to wait until we are 21 to get this, we should be offered when you're 18 and assessed to be ready. The odds are against you as you get older, so if you are put forward from 18, at least you get multiple chances.

4.15 The Chair summed up some of the issues raised by young people at the session:

- The circumstances and needs of care leavers were different and which required very specific and bespoke support;
- With the exception of those young people already in a social housing tenancy, care leavers were uncertain and anxious about their future housing situation;
- Care leavers were also reticent about going to university as this may impact on their future entitlement to social housing (where it was noted that this is extended to age 25 in other local authorities);
- Care leavers may not always be given adequate housing advice or in a timely manner, and there may be a case for more specialist housing advice and guidance to be provided through the leaving care team;
- Whilst some care leavers were very happy with their supported housing, there were past and present concerns around affordability, dependency and employment.

4.16 The Chair thanked all the care leavers that contributed to this session, both those that attended the meeting in person and those who contributed to the earlier focus group.

#### Comparative Provision - London Borough of Lambeth

4.17 The Lead Commissioner for all housing support for young people presented to the Commission including homeless young people, young people aged 16-24 and care leavers.

- Supported Housing Pathway - supports approximately 225 young people who were formerly homeless including 25 teenage parents. Accommodation is mainly provided through two large hostels within the borough.

- Semi-independent living - spot purchase arrangements to support around 160 looked after young people and care leavers.
- 4.18 Lambeth undertook a wide-ranging needs assessment of young people's housing needs in 2019/20 which included young homeless people up to age of 24 and local care leavers. There were four main elements to this assessment:
- Prevention of homelessness/ the increased use of foster care and staying put arrangements . The best option is for young people to be at home or in a 'home environment' for as long as possible.
  - Assessment of needs - are young people being assessed in the right way, by the right people?
  - Is commissioned housing support of sufficiently high quality, in the right place. Is there sufficient specialised housing-related support provision to meet the complex and diverse needs of young people?
  - Are there structures in place to support successful moves into long term independent accommodation with appropriate transitional support? Are young people getting enough help to sustain accommodation?
- 4.19 The needs assessment was focused around three different forms of data collection:
- Consultations with stakeholders e.g. Care leavers, Semi-independent living providers, Housing Needs, Young People's Pathway Team • Children's Social Care.
  - Data analysis - Housing, Children's Social Care, Adult's Social Care, Mosaic , a snapshot needs analysis of care leavers and local databases (e.g. health – provider reporting, MARAC, Crime and Community Safety);
  - Comparative Assessment - to identify best practice of other Local Authority provision.
- 4.20 The needs assessment uncovered the following issues around care leavers in semi-independent housing:
- 126 of the 153 placements assessed were outside the borough of Lambeth - and many were not even in south London. Young people were frustrated at being placed outside of the borough but then required to uproot and relocate back to Lambeth for social housing.
  - Higher than expected numbers of 22+ year old care leavers in semi-independent housing - with the concern that this is creating dependency and problems for moving on;
  - High numbers of non-British nationals - unaccompanied minors seeking refuge in the UK;
  - High numbers of NEETs - those not in education, training or employment - are in supported accommodation, which questions what additional support is being provided;
  - There was a relatively high incidence of safeguarding concerns and serious incidents (11% mental health-related, 11% physical health and 11% threatening behaviour).
- 4.21 An evaluation of care leavers' needs was undertaken to provide a snapshot of the nature of support they required. This revealed:
- 29 young people were in prison, with 8 for murder/ manslaughter offences;
  - 99 of 502 care leavers had a support need around mental health - and many of these mental health needs were not being met;

- 85 of 502 identified as being involved in gangs and/ or criminal exploitation
- 4.22 The snapshot also indicated that young people experienced a number of problems with their tenancies:
- High numbers of over stayers, unplanned moves and evictions;
  - Significant gap in transition and ongoing floating support;
  - 2019/20 spend on semi-independent living £9.3m
  - Challenge to get care leavers into social housing (& out of Lambeth where needed).
- 4.23 Care leavers are given 'Priority A' status for social housing on the local housing register and are eligible to bid for properties up to the age of 25. There were, however, challenges for young people being able to access this offer and to sustain tenancies when these had been granted. A significant number of young people cannot be safely housed within the borough and the service struggles to find long-term secure accommodation outside of Lambeth.
- 4.24 From the needs assessment, a transformation programme had been developed to improve Joint Housing & CSC housing-related support pathways for young people. There are 4 new elements in this improvement plan (to 2023):
- Prevention: Early intervention, mediation, family floating support, and emergency timeout provision;
  - Assessment: – Integrated youth hub (one stop shop for young people located under one roof) and setting up an assessment centre for housing;
  - High quality accommodation: De-commission all current provision, commission 200 units of small & specialist services (special needs, additional needs, young parents, LGBT, female only, high risk, unaccompanied minors), employ a social worker, commission a clinical psychology team;
  - Successful moves into independent accommodation: Floating support, housing first services in their own homes, Bidding Officer a housing officer located in leaving care team to support them to bid for houses, Joint Housing & CSC Care Leavers Protocol (as this clarified the roles of the two separate services in supporting care leavers).
  - Working with Centrepont to build 40-50 modular homes in Lambeth for employed young people.

#### Comparative Provision - London Borough of Islington

- 4.25 The leaving care service in Islington is known as Independent Futures, and the service manager provided a practice-based perspective on provision. The service supports care leavers from age 16 through to 25. The authority has a large care population including large numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors and young people entering care at age 16/17 under the Southwark judgement. In relation to housing support for care leavers the authority provides:
- Staying Put with foster carers - this is particularly helpful for young people going to university as they may stay back at the foster home during the holidays and at the end of their study;
  - Semi-independent accommodation - over 100 units are commissioned across Islington, Camden and Hackney;



- The House Project supports cohorts of young people to move onto social housing and sustain their tenancies (using peer support processes);
- Social housing - when young people are ready to sustain an individual tenancy they are entitled to permanent social housing let up to the age of 25. Every care experienced young person is entitled to social tenancy.

4.26 The authority supports a housing pathway which aims to maximise the choice of local care leavers. There are two assessment units where care leavers stay for between 4 and 6 weeks (longer if they are under the age of 18 or have additional needs). With a large number of young people entering care direct from their family, they often do not have the skills to live independently so need additional support through the assessment unit. 24-hour support is available for these young people. As care leavers' skills and experience develop, they are stepped down to floating support (no on-site provision, but bookable sessions during office hours).

4.27 Children's social care and support has become increasingly commodified, and it was challenging to commission the same level and quality of housing accommodation and support for care leavers aged 18+ compared to young people aged under 18. There were many new and emerging providers in this field - and the service needed to ensure that these organisations were child focused and committed to providing the best possible care, particularly in relation to emotional health as many care leavers have complex mental health problems.

4.28 If care leavers are not ready for independent tenancy, they may be placed in temporary accommodation and provided with additional support to help them build the skills and confidence to do so (which can be provided weekly or more frequently if needed).

4.29 The House Project (a national care leaver support programme) was Commissioned to provide intensive support for care leavers to develop skills and experience to manage independent tenancy. The programme has been operating for 3 years and provides care leavers with a 6 month intensive programme of support from practitioners and care leaver peers. In Islington the project is used to bridge care leavers into social housing, but in other areas it is used to support young people into the private rented sector. It has supported 22 young people into social housing to date (10 per cohort). Although this did require additional investment, it was delivering real cost savings as it helped to transfer young people from more expensive semi-independent housing into social care.

4.30 When care leavers are assessed to be ready to take on a social tenancy independently and ready for nomination, they are allocated 800 points which give them priority status and allows them to bid for properties. The service believes that it is important that young people are able to exercise choice and can bid independently for properties.

4.31 For some young care leavers it is not safe or appropriate for them to return to Islington to seek permanent accommodation (serious youth violence, trauma, exploitation) and the service works with other authorities to develop reciprocal arrangements to support this cohort of young people. In most circumstances, the authority requires the care leaver to be resident for 2 years for them to be eligible, which can be challenging.

- 4.32 Other benefits that care leavers are entitled to in Islington include a full reimbursement of council tax up to the age of 25. In addition, care leavers are also reimbursed for digital (wifi) connections in their new property for the first 12 months of their tenancy.
- 4.33 Transition was noted to be a significant concern for care leavers, as they often struggled to adapt to leaving care alongside also moving from child to adult services (e.g. mental health). Transition was also an issue at age 25, where the service noted that care-experienced young people were still in need, even though statutory responsibility for care leavers ceased at this age. Islington was therefore considering ways it could continue to support care-experienced young people beyond the age of 25.

#### Questions from the Commission

- 4.34 In Hackney, just 400 social lets became available in 2021 which the council could re-let (voids) of which 18 units (16 one bedroom and 2 two bedroom) were allocated to care leavers via a quota system. How do social nominations work in other boroughs? How long do care leavers have to wait to get a social housing tenancy once on the register?
- (Lambeth) There is no quota in Lambeth as care leavers are allocated to Band A priority and can bid equally with others in this priority band. So long as care leavers are actively bidding, it is likely they will get a property within 6 months. The service was working on a joint protocol between housing and leaving care services as care experienced young people sometimes struggled to maintain the tenancy in the first instance, so procedures were being adapted to give this cohort a second chance in the bidding process.
  - (Islington) care leavers also have a priority in the borough and can bid alongside other priority groups. Pre-covid, care leavers were usually placed in social housing within 3-6 months, but now this was more difficult and was taking up to a year.
- 4.35 Can further details be provided on the work in Lambeth to provide 40-50 modular units for young employed people with Centrepoint?
- (Lambeth) Centrepoint has a robust fund raising arm and has the funding to support this development. Centrepoint has funding to build 300 modular units across London and Manchester and approached Lambeth to partner in this project. Lambeth has identified vacant land where the development can take place and appropriate permissions are currently being sought to progress this. Centrepoint will be required to pay a peppercorn rent and Lambeth will have 100% nomination rights to the units when built.
- 4.36 Could further information be provided on what is meant by floating support? To what extent do authorities utilise the voluntary sector to support care experienced young people?
- (Lambeth) Family floating support is provided to families as a preventative service to prevent family relationship breakdown or to help maintain foster care placements. Families experience a wide range of issues, which with additional support, can help to maintain the child in the home or foster care placement.
  - (Islington) Floating support this is structured support provided to young people to help them develop skills and confidence to maintain their tenancy. Islington uses the support of the local charity Grandmentors, which links

local adults (aged 50+) to local care leavers to provide additional advice, guidance and mentor support.

4.37 To what extent will the recommissioning approach in Lambeth deliver savings on the current £9.3m expenditure on semi-independent housing?

- (Lambeth) The team has had to be significantly expanded to decommission and recommission all housing provision. The financial modelling predicts that the minimum saving will be £2m per annum, and it will deliver better higher quality services that better meet the needs of care leavers. It was expected that the new approach will deliver better outcomes, with more support to enable young people to stay at home or in foster care. In addition, the new commissioning approach will replace the large commissioned hostels with more discrete and housing support to better meet the needs of care leavers and young people. Instead, small 7 bedroom properties will be commissioned with a variety of support (24hr through to floating) which will help them progress and thrive with their lives. It should also be noted that Lambeth rejected a number of housing offers as the proposed rents were far too high to enable young people to progress and live on and don't have to live a life on benefits.

4.38 Is there any further data on the number of young people returning from university and who can claim social housing tenancy rights?

- (Lambeth) This has not been an issue in the borough as care leavers are entitled to a social tenancy up to the age of 25. Also, many young people had a social tenancy and were attending university as they were studying in London.

4.39 Can further information be provided about The House Project in Islington and how this supports young people into permanent individual tenancies?

- The initial premise of the National House Project was that there would be a physical home for young people to stay, receive support for them to enable them to move on. This wasn't possible in Islington, but a shared space was made available where a cohort of young people could provide a support network for each other. The project found that this network of support continued when they moved into their own social tenancy.

4.40 (To Hackney Officers) Is it possible that the social housing allocation system developed in Lambeth and Islington could be developed in Hackney?

- It was apparent that many authorities face the same pressures with densely populated areas with extreme pressures within local housing markets. To support comparative approaches it would be useful to know how many social lets are made each year by respective authorities and how many of these are made to care leavers. It was noted that Hackney made just over 400 social lets, of which 215 were one-bedroom units, of which a significant proportion were for older people. The main reason for voids in Hackney is the death of a tenant which means that it is difficult to plan for relets.
- The service has a quota of 18 social lets per annum to care leavers. Officers had been discussing this and had considered a number of other options;
- The possibility of removing / reducing some other social housing quotas and giving these to care leavers to bring the quota up to 30;
- Allowing care leavers aged 18 to bid for social housing (though it was not clear if this would lead to more care leavers in tenancies).

## **Cllr Sharon Patrick in the Chair**

### Local Policy and Practice

4.41 Officers from Corporate Parenting, Housing Needs and Housing Strategy presented to the Commission. The presentation can be viewed here in full. The key points raised in the presentation are summarised below.

### Corporate Parenting

4.42 Hackney's Leaving Care Service provides an offer of support to all young people with leaving care rights between the age of 18 and 25. This includes a statutory duty to support care leavers to access suitable accommodation between the ages of 18 and 21. There are increasing levels of demand for services:

- As of January 2022, the Service was supporting a total of 399 care leavers aged 18 to 25, including 296 young people aged 18 to 21;
- The number of care leavers is going up over time: there were 316 at the end of March 2019, 335 at the end of March 2020, which had risen to 376 at the end of March 2021;
- As of January 2022, there were 413 children in social care, 129 of which were aged 16 or 17.
- The forecasted spend within the Children and Families Service for care leavers accommodation for 2021/2 is £4.9 million.

4.43 As with other boroughs, Hackney offers a wide range of accommodation to support young people leaving care. Types of accommodation, the number of young people in such settings and the cost are given below.

4.44 Where possible, the corporate parenting service supports young people to stay in foster care through a Staying Put arrangement, which is what most 18 year olds would experience. In February 2022 there were 54 young people in Staying Put, up from 33 in March 2021. The issue that this presents is that if all foster carers kept all their children Staying Put until 21, there would be few fostering places available for younger children.

4.45 Supported Lodgings were also a preferred option, especially for young people with no previous experience of foster care. Since 2020 the service has recruited 12 Supported Lodgings hosts. It remains a challenge to fully explain the benefits of this type of accommodation to care leavers.

4.46 Semi Independent Accommodation covers a huge range of accommodation from 24 hour on-site provision to shared accommodation with just 5 hours of floating support per week. A small number of young people have very complex needs who cannot live alongside others, and thus very bespoke accommodation is needed to be commissioned. There are many challenges to this type of accommodation as this is predominantly supplied by private providers. In particular, the quality can be variable, costs are high and it is difficult to secure provision where it is needed (locally and in areas where looked after children have lived before turning 18).

4.47 Similar to Lambeth, the Commissioning process for this has recently been reviewed and where it has been agreed a new Young People's Pathway:

- To work with a smaller number (n=3) of commissioned providers;
- That young people would be accommodated in smaller homes for a maximum of 7-8 young people
- That there would be improved flexibility in the support arrangements for young people (minimising requirement for young people to move to obtain higher levels of support);
- More affordable for young people;
- All homes commissioned will be in or the surrounding boroughs to Hackney to help them maintain local connections
- 7 year contracts at competitive rates which will deliver cost savings over time.

4.48 Re-procurement of semi-independent contracts informed by a scoping exercise led by Hackney of Tomorrow around what care leavers want from supported accommodation. 30 young people living across 7 semi-independent homes were consulted.

- 80% felt adequately supported when they moved into their current homes;
- Only 63% felt they received the support they needed in their homes;
- On average, young people said they were accessing 2.5 hours of key worker support per week;
- 70% said they felt harassed rather than supported by staff at their homes if they fall into rent areas;
- 90% felt the home was adequately preparing them for independent living;
- Only 57% described their homes as safe and secure;
- Only 37% felt that anti-social behaviour in their homes were dealt with effectively;
- 77% said they felt financially trapped in their accommodation;
- Only 57% said their homes were in a good state of repair.

4.49 As part of the scoping process the service consulted care leavers about what they felt that they needed to better support their move into independent living. From this work it was apparent that care leavers;

- Required more specialist and consistent housing advice and support, earlier - so they knew what was going to happen before the age of 21;
- Wanted realistic options for housing which were stable and affordable;
- To have greater choice about where they wanted to live.

4.50 As of January 2022, 148 care leavers were living in Hackney, 66 in neighbouring boroughs and 185 further afield and each authority has different rules and eligibility criteria for supporting care leavers which is difficult for social workers to navigate and support young people. Care leavers benefit from expert advice in this context, and this model has worked for welfare and benefits where specialist input has been recently commissioned for care leavers.

4.51 Understandably, many of the young people placed outside of the borough develop social connections (friends, foster carers) and education, training or work opportunities which they want to maintain rather than return to Hackney when they leave care. It can be difficult to secure the same level of support in these areas, as eligibility and entitlements for care leavers vary by borough. Therefore they are not entitled to social housing and it can be difficult to procure semi-independent housing also in some areas.

4.52 Whether careleavers can join the Housing Register in the borough they live depends on that local Councils allocation policy (which varies widely):

- Hackney care leavers only have an automatic local connection to the area outside the borough due to being a care leaver if they have been resident in that area for a continuous period of 2 years or more, of which some of the 2 year period falls before the person attained the age of 16. In London, levels of residency can be much higher 3 years + or even 10 years in one authority.
- If they move to an area outside Hackney after they are 16 they would have to meet any residency requirements that area impose. In most areas they would have to show a level of housing need to access the register.
- In the context of the above, it can be very difficult for care leavers outside the borough to get on a local housing register outside of Hackney.

4.53 There is a quota of 18 housing units (16 one bedroom and 2 two bedroom) which are available to care leavers each year. Care leavers need to be in the letting before the age of 21, therefore nominations are generally made before care leavers reach the age of 20. There are a number of criteria which enable young people to be put forward:

- Is the care leaver approaching or recently turned 20?
- Do they want to live in Hackney?
- Do they have leave to remain in the UK?
- Are they likely to be able to maintain a tenancy?
- Do they have rent arrears?
- Are they most 'in need' ?

4.54 There are a number of challenges in the operation of the quota system for care leavers in particular in making sure that the system is open, fair and transparent when demand far exceeds the number of social housing lets available. There were also discussions as to whether the nomination process should reflect highest priority needs or offer a positive incentive for those doing well. It was also difficult to determine those who were most in need and how to manage the expectations of care leavers. As has been noted earlier, there was little parity between those seeking social housing in Hackney compared to outside the borough as entitlements varied.

4.55 Local services were of the view that a number of improvements in the following areas would assist:

- A dedicated leaving care housing officer, who can offer advice and support to our care leavers;
- Access to specific private rental schemes;
- A rethink of the quota system;
- New, diversified housing opportunities for care leavers with a range of strengths, needs and ambitions in and around Hackney;
- Clear pathways that are easily communicated.

### Housing Needs

4.56 The Housing Needs and Benefits Team highlighted the following demand and affordability pressures in the local housing market in supporting care leavers and other young people to find accommodation:

- In the last 10 years Hackney has seen the second highest jump in property prices increasing by an average of 105 % to an average of £604,000, and therefore increasingly unaffordable
- There were 8500 households on the Housing Register - even after the recent review which reduced the register from 13,500, all of these 8,500 households are those in real need;
- More and more households were assessed to be a priority need; over 4,700 applicants were considered to be in acute need and where households had multiple and complex needs (which included previous care leavers);
- Homelessness levels are also increasing - 2020/21 up nearly 9% and up over 52% since 2017-18;
- Number of social housing lets reduced from 1638 in 2010 to 409 in 2019/20 (215 were one bedroom properties including over 55's and sheltered housing)
- Demand for one bedroom properties is the highest with over 2500+ in acute housing need on the register;
- Renting is a challenge for single individuals with rents for an average one-bedroom dwelling in the borough standing at 61.2% of median pre-tax pay in London, one of the highest ratios in London
- The only affordable option in PRS in Hackney and most of London is shared accommodation, for care leavers who are not in employment this is most likely the only option due to restrictions imposed by the benefit cap.

4.57 Hackney is one of a few boroughs that operate a social housing quota for care leavers. It was noted however that even with 18 properties per year reserved for care leavers, given the number of care leavers in Hackney, the overwhelming majority would not get a property. This system therefore inflated expectations of care leavers that they would get social let property. It was apparent that many young people who should be seeking accommodation in the private rented sector are not, because they hope that they can obtain a social housing let.

4.58 Waiting times for properties available through the Housing Register are long and growing as fewer properties become available for re-let. The waiting times were currently c.3 years for 1 bedroom, c.12 years for 2 bedrooms. The main reason a social let becomes available now is when a tenant dies. Given the pressure for affordable housing, people do not give up their tenancies. Despite a reducing pool of available properties, the council has maintained the quota at 18 properties per annum.

4.59 There are other ways in which housing support for care leavers is provided. A Setting Up Home Allowance of up to £2000 is available to care leavers assessed as ready for a tenancy to support them in furnishing their first property. If care leavers are seeking help to prevent them becoming homeless, Greenhouse can provide the rental deposit and 1 month's rent in advance for affordable privately rented accommodation.

4.60 The borough also provides a Peer Landlord Scheme through Thamesreach which provides shared accommodation with support. In Hackney, the borough has let a property to Thamesmead at a peppercorn rent to support homeless young

people who need additional support, and care leavers are one of the targeted groups.

- 4.61 The provision of personalised housing advice. The Benefits and Housing Needs Service are committed to providing advice and assistance to all households in housing need in the borough.
- Personal Housing Plans - developed by residents with Housing Advice staff - a realistic plan agreed and developed with the resident that documents the needs and aspirations allowing residents to set their goals. Outlines key actions required by residents with the council's support. Documents all options and assists with decision making. Residents can then use it to chart their progress.
  - Income maximisation and affordability - Officers will assist residents to maximise their income through welfare benefit advice, access to employment and training advice through JCP and Hackney Works. Utilising LHA rates, rental market data and household circumstances, residents will be able to identify affordable areas to concentrate their efforts.
  - Securing Properties - Utilising contacts already in place the B&HN Service can assist residents to negotiate the Private Rented Sector, ensure that landlords and agents fulfil their legal requirements and that properties meet required standards. Residents have access to HomeswapperUK that advertises Social Tenancies throughout the UK

### Housing Strategy

- 4.62 A new Hackney Housing Strategy 2022- 2027 which will cover the long -range housing options and priorities was under development. The strategy will commence in the summer and will specifically recognise the needs of care leavers and they will be a priority group within the new housing strategy and there will be a new housing pathway to support them.
- 4.63 The key problem for Hackney was the limited availability of good quality, affordable housing. In response, the new housing strategy would be looking to increase the range of housing supply options for young people including modular builds. There was also an asset review which was underway to help identify properties and sites which can be used to support housing supply. Short term options would also continue including the rent deposit scheme and the social housing quota for care leavers.
- 4.64 The Hackney Housing Company was still being legally set up, but once established it could be used to develop homes for care leavers. In addition, the borough would be looking to see how it can extend the Hackney Living Rent scheme, which provides affordable long term tenancies at  $\frac{1}{3}$  of market rents. It was also essential that there was a single unified approach to support for care leavers which incorporates both Corporate Parenting and Housing Needs and Benefits and it was expected that the new strategy would set out a single pathway of support.
- 4.65 The Housing Strategy team was also beginning to engage with local housing partners such as Housing Associations to see how they may contribute. Housing Associations have local housing stock and other support resources which the council may be able to link in with.



4.66 The Council as Corporate Parent would be central in shaping the approach to care leavers in the emerging housing strategy, and like other parents would aim to secure the best quality, affordable housing for young people in its care. Young people all have differing housing and other support related needs so it was also important to ensure that the strategy allows the development of personal housing plans to best meet the needs of young people.

#### Next Steps

- 4.67 All services present had been working together to identify what additional support can be provided to care leavers in Hackney. To this end:
- A dedicated workstream with managers from Benefits and Housing Needs and Leaving Care has been developed which meets monthly to work on solutions to identified problems;
  - New process to utilise homeless preventions monies earlier in the process whilst able to show DLUH return on investment via HCLIC
  - Continued housing advice on affordability and realistic options directly with CL and in relevant professional settings
  - Explore setting up a LBH Youth & Careleaver Homeless Prevention forum Design & implement a finding and keeping my new home toolkit - partners borough wide (in and outside the council);
  - Amend Lettings Policy to accept care leavers housing application at age 18 whilst still in care placement - implemented share plans

#### Questions from the Commission

4.68 Although 400 properties come available each year, mainly through the death of existing tenants, a further number of tenancies are assigned or succeeded each year. Could any of these be reassigned to support care leavers?

- The law changed in 2012 which limited successions of social housing tenancies to one. Whilst the council may offer discretionary succession rights, in practice this is done infrequently.

4.69 What additional help can be provided for young people wanting to go to university but anxious that in doing so, they may lose their rights to social housing in Hackney?

- With 40 care leavers attending university, the council has one of the highest number of care leavers attending higher education. Where care leavers do wish to attend, advice is focused towards those universities outside of London as this may be more affordable to care leavers. For those care leavers considering going to university, advice is generally to focus on the potential employability and aspirations after they have completed their studies.

4.70 The Commission noted the following:

- Given the demands for social housing it is clear that the quota system was not working effectively for care leavers, this was further complicated by conflicting ambitions for the quota which centred around it operating as an incentive but also there to support the most vulnerable and in need young people. In order to be able to offer clear and consistent advice to care leavers, it was suggested that the quota system may require further

examination. The service needs to ensure that those most in need and likely to benefit from social housing are prioritised, but also ensure that a comparable offer is made available to those not prioritised. There needs to be greater consistency about the housing offer to care leavers.

4.71 From the presentation, it was apparent that 140 placements in semi-independent housing was costing in excess of £3m per annum, at a unit cost of £26,000 per care leaver. As rents can be reclaimed from Housing Benefit, why is it costing the council so much? Is there anything that can be done on an invest to save basis, given that this appears to be propping up the council's inability to provide longer term tenancies?

4.72 Can further details be provided on how the Housing Company may be able to assist with extending care leavers housing options? What are the likely costs of such interventions through the Housing Company, the tenures that it might be able to deliver and the timescale for delivery?

- There are multiple ways in which the Housing Company might respond which might include buying existing properties as well as funding new development, these would of course have different timeframes. The Housing Company may buy properties to let a market rent which is then used to subsidise rental provision for care leavers. The Housing Company would issue shorthold tenancies rather than longer term leases - but all leases would be let under the principles of the Hackney Better Rent Campaign. The Housing Company can also access funds in different ways to the Council itself. The HC would also be able to explore modular builds as well.

4.73 If priority Band A was extended to care leavers from the age of 18 through to 25, how many additional young people may be likely to get a social housing let?

- Hackney was one of a few boroughs which operated a quota system. There is an argument that only the most vulnerable care leavers should be provided with a social housing tenancy with the remainder being supported into the PRS. Whilst opening up the list to 18-25 year old care leavers may help a small number into a social tenancy, there were no guarantees, especially if they needed a larger 2 bedroom property.
- It would be difficult to model given that voids were riding through the death of existing tenants. It was noted that there were a number of 1 bedroom community flats which could be brought back into use to offer long term lets to care leavers.

4.74 Are there any plans to extend Council tax exemption up to the age of 25 as is the case in other boroughs?

- Care leavers that live in Hackney are exempt from Council Tax until the age of 25. There is a London-wide campaign to standardise the benefits across all London boroughs which Hackney does support.

4.75 The Commission made a number of observations from officers' presentations:

- Care leavers had to be eligible for support from the Greenroom and in danger of becoming homeless to access the deposit for a property in the private rented sector. It was felt that it was unacceptable that care leavers should be exposed to such uncertainty in order for them to gain help.

- The council has a special duty of care to care leavers and this must be reflected in the language which officers and the council use (they are not just 'residents');
- Care leavers face a number of 'drop-off' points at various stages of their transition from care (18, 21 and 25) and the council evidently needs to work harder to ensure that there is more effective support for them during this process;
- The Council as a corporate parent should undertake further work to establish a truly corporate offer of support for care leavers.

4.76 The Cabinet member for Education and Children's Social Care concluded by making the following points:

- Whilst the number of void properties coming up for re-let cannot be predicted, the turnaround time for voids can be improved.
- As a corporate parent, it was important that the council communicated its high expectations and aspirations for all care leavers, and whilst this was a difficult situation it was important that young people themselves did not feel that they were part of that challenge.
- It was planned that young care leavers would be supported to make a number of videos for other care leavers to help explain further the options that were available;
- There was also a lack of regulatory oversight and statutory guidance for the provision of social housing for care leavers and young people in general. Additional regulation would help improve the effectiveness of local authorities commissioning processes.
- There was a need for the Council to reflect further on what young people have said, on what support was working for them, what wasn't and what else might be needed.

4.77 The Chair thanked everyone attending, officers from Hackney, Lambeth and Islington and care leavers. There was not enough time for further discussion, but the Commission would consider the evidence presented and make a number of recommendations to the relevant Cabinet members to consider. The Commission may then decide to reconvene at a later date to assess what improvements had been made.

## **5 Minutes of the Meeting**

5.1 The draft minutes of the previous meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022 had been delayed and would be provided at the next meeting.

## **6 Living in Hackney Work Programme 2021/22**

6.1 The Chair referred to the work programme and outlined the discussion items for the next meetings.

## **7 Any Other Business**

7.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7pm – 9.45pm