



Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Paper presented by Ruth Davison, Chief Executive of Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association (ISHA)

Background:

ISHA is a community housing association which builds and manages homes in North and East London, particularly in Hackney, Islington and Waltham Forest. It is anchored in those places and seeks to partner with local authorities and others who share their vision.

Building a fairer, safer and more sustainable Hackney

ISHA helps deliver that vision by:

- Building and helping others build
- Striving to be a great landlord
- By being anchored in the community
- Being a great employer
- Being serious about environmental sustainability

ISHA in numbers:

The majority of the homes we own and manage are in Hackney. ISHA first moved into the borough 60 years ago and has been building ever since. We are strongly committed to Hackney, building predominantly social homes and shared ownership homes to help keep it mixed and vibrant and meet housing need. The majority of the 875 homes we have in Hackney have been built in the last 20 years, many with the assistance of the borough. We also help other small community housing associations to build – in Hackney, North London Muslim HA – through the North River Alliance consortium which we launched 15 years ago.

ISHA's Board committed not to convert social rents to 'affordable' rents under the Affordable Homes Programme of 2010 onwards. There are no affordability checks for social rents, and we have never had introductory or time-limited tenancies – all are life-time tenancies.

Of the social rented homes, 247 are one-beds, 173 are two-beds, 106 are three-beds and 46 are four-beds.



We were the first housing association in the borough to be a London Living Wage employer and insist all of our contractors are too. We don't just want people to be housed well, but to live well.

1 How registered providers are working in partnership with the Council to enable higher levels of recycling on estates they manage

We take the climate emergency seriously and have achieved 'SHIFT GOLD' status, a housing industry sustainability award that looks at new and existing homes, commercial spaces and business practices. Sustainability is one of the pillars of our new strategic plan (2020-2025), but to date recycling on estates has not been a priority for us.

Recycling provision is available on most of our housing estates in Hackney and we periodically provide articles in our resident newsletter to encourage residents to recycle.

We have a target to increase recycling on our estates by 20% by March 21. We'll do this in consultation with residents and the local authority waste management teams. We have started work on our two hostels in Hackney at Ainsworth Road and Green Lanes where there is currently no recycling provision.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with Hackney to increase recycling on our street properties.

2. Community investment by housing associations, approaches to supporting their residents to succeed, and partnership with the Council to improve social and economic wellbeing.

It may sound trite to say that one of the best things we can do as a landlord to help residents succeed is to keep rents low, but it's true. Our rents in Hackney are predominantly social, not so-called 'affordable rents.' That means more money in the pockets of residents who pay their own rent. We also now let all homes fully carpeted and with curtains. We are working with residents on our let standard beyond this – for example providing white goods and furniture packs for those who come to us with nothing. This ensures they don't furnish their new homes by going into (costly) debt.

We also pay all staff and contractors the London Living Wage and were the first housing association in the borough to do this.

Outreach and Support services

We offer temporary support to ISHA customers to help them maintain their accommodation and independence, improve their well-being and remain safe. Main areas of support are around financial issues such as:



- budgeting, debts and rent arrears; benefit and charitable grant applications; and accessing local food banks
- housing and tenancy issues such as dealing with anti-social behaviour or domestic violence; rent arrears and repairs; eviction prevention; setting-up home, arranging adaptations and finding more suitable housing
- finding social activities and building support networks
- accessing specialist services such as occupational therapy, mental health services or drug and alcohol support
- finding work or training

Support workers carry an active caseload of around 25 at any given time. All our Hackney residents in need of this service are eligible to apply or be referred.

Currently, half the case load is working with Hackney residents, and the primary need is mental health.

Lien Viet Outreach and Support service

All of ISHA's Vietnamese residents are able to access the service provided by our two Vietnamese support workers, who provide the same kind of services as above but with the added factor of providing the language and cultural support needed by many of those residents. ISHA has 75 Vietnamese residents in Hackney.

Our staff also provide housing related support services to the wider Vietnamese communities in our key boroughs. We provide drop in advice sessions at other Vietnamese community organisations and run a monthly Community Group for Vietnamese people. People can self-refer to the service or be referred by other organisations and landlords. Currently, we have contact with 25 Hackney-based customers who are not ISHA residents.

We run an annual daytrip for our Vietnamese residents and their families and hold a Lunar New Year celebration each year for residents and the wider community. And in 2019, we were one of four community organisations supporting migrant communities in the Borough to work in tandem with the Geffrye Museum (now Museum of the Home) to run a Wellbeing festival in the museum grounds.

Bursaries

ISHA offers bursaries for residents seeking support to improve their employment prospects. Up to six residents each year can apply for a maximum £500 bursary to help them pursue studies, attend training courses, purchase equipment etc that will assist them in finding work or finding better paid work. In 2019-20, one Hackney resident received a bursary to enable them to attend a coding course.

Community garden projects



ISHA offers small grants of up to £200 for resident groups on its estates to form garden clubs, to become involved in maintaining and improving their communal garden areas. Two Hackney-based clubs have received grants so far.

ISHA has also developed a relationship with EcoActive, an organisation specialising in sustainable, community gardening projects. They obtained Lottery Grant funding of more than £7,000, backed up by £1,000 from ISHA to start running projects during 2020-21 in two of our Hackney estates. These will improve the quality of communal gardens, get residents involved in learning new skills and involve local communities too.

Signposting

ISHA provides information on its website, accessible to residents and non-residents to help people find work, training and employment support. We work with local authority employment teams like Hackney Works and have contacts with specialist organisations such as Scope, Mental Health Working and the Richmond Fellowship, which help people with disabilities or mental health needs back to work.

Our website also contains information and links to organisations in our key boroughs, including Hackney, for people needing to access services offering support on mental health, substance misuse, financial management, staying safe and services for older people.

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