
London Borough of Hackney
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2020/21
Date of meeting Wednesday, 14 December, 2020

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

Chair	Cllr Sharon Patrick
Councillors in Attendance:	Cllr Sade Etti, Cllr Anthony McMahon, Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ian Rathbone Cllr Penny Wrout, Cllr Anna Lynch
Apologies:	
Officers in Attendance	Jennifer Wynter (Head of Benefits and Housing Needs), Marcia Facey (Operations Manager), Rebecca Rennison (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply), Sabrina Pathan (Rough Sleeping Manager), Ian Jones (Legislation and Projects Officer),
Other People in Attendance	Kathy Meade (Hackney Doorways)
Members of the Public	None
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Councillor Sharon Patrick in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 No apologies for absence.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the meeting etiquettes.
- 1.3 Apologies for lateness from Cllr McMahon.
- 1.4 At the start of the meeting the Chair thanked council staff (particularly our ICT support officer) for their hard work in making the meetings possible during a pandemic and maintaining services following the cyber-attack on Hackney Council in addition overcoming the world wide Google outage today to make the meeting possible tonight. Thank You!

2 Urgent Items/ Order of Business

2.1 There was no urgent items and the items of the meeting was as per the agenda.

3 Declaration of Interest

3.1 No declarations of interest.

4 Winter Night Shelter Provision in Hackney

4.1 In attendance at the meeting for this item was Kathy Meade, Trustee from Hackney Doorways. Also in attendance from London Borough of Hackney (LBH) was Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply, Cllr Rebecca Rennison; Head of Benefits and Housing Needs, Jennifer Wynter and Rough Sleeping Manager, Sabrina Pathan.

4.2 The Chair introduced this item by explaining the winter night shelter provisions would normally open in November as the weather starts to become colder. These are usually in church halls and were communal provisions. The global pandemic has impacted on the provision of night shelters.

Government guidance does not endorse the opening of communal night shelter facilities. The Government has advised rotating night shelter models carry a higher risk of infection and should not be used. The Government suggested night shelter projects should consider whether they can provide self-contained accommodation options.

In addition providers need ensure that staff, volunteers, and guests are supported to adhere to the advice, and other legislation and guidance on social distancing, shielding, self-isolation, and working safely during Covid-19.

4.3 The Commission asked for an update on:

- The opening, provision and operations of winter shelters in the borough and the impact of Covid-19.
- Hackney Council's decision making and support in relation to the local winter shelter service provision in the borough.

4.4 The Trustee from Hackney Doorways commenced the presentation and highlighted the following points from the report in the agenda.

4.4.1 Kathy has been a trustee and company secretary since 2019 and is an active volunteer for the organisation's women's shelter provision.

4.4.2 Night shelters have been impacted for 2 reasons a) the new night shelter strategy, b) Covid-19.

4.4.3 Hackney Doorways have been operating the night shelter provision in the borough for 25 years. Historically it has been a roving night shelter. Guests would be out all day and carry their personal belongs with them. Returning in the evening.

- 4.4.4 From November – December they would offer 15 bed spaces. From January – March this increased to 25.
- 4.4.5 Previously there was 14 venues operating in the winter months. They had a main shelter and a dormitory because some of the churches were unable to have a capacity of 25.
- 4.4.6 Hackney Doorways were in the process of reviewing their model of operation to consider if it was appropriate for the 21st Century, the impact on the shelter guests and the respect for privacy.
- 4.4.7 The provision only operated for 5 months of the year. It was pointed out homelessness is not confined to those months and the bad weather is not just confined to these months either.
- 4.4.8 The long term plan for the night shelter was to move to a permanent premises and provide an all year round facilities. These plans were impacted by Covid and the Government's guidance that night shelters could not operate in their current form.
- 4.4.9 Through the assistance of the Benefits and Housing Needs Service in Hackney Council Hackney Doorways have secured a premises on a short term lease until February 2021. This is a former council building in Stoke Newington. They have been able to take a maximum of 13 guests.
- 4.4.10 Although this provision is lower than their previous capacity it is anticipated that by operating throughout the year they would end up supporting more people than they would operating over the 5 months.
- 4.4.11 The new building was risk assessed for Covid and is in line with the Government guidelines.
- 4.4.12 Hackney Doorways are not using volunteers in the same they did previously. This is due to the Covid restrictions. To ensure continuity and Covid protection, they have a small team of volunteers to supplement the team of short term temporary staff they have overnight.
- 4.4.13 They are looking for permanent venue to lease long term to shift this provision to a year round facility.
- 4.4.14 A second development in the borough has been the opening of a women's night shelter. With the assistance of Hackney Council they received some start-up funding from the rough sleeper initiative. This has enabled them to set up a 1 year pilot. This is located in Clapton in a building leased from the United Reformed Church. This enables them to accommodate up to 9 women in a shared room for up to 90 days. This gives Hackney Doorways more time to work with them and move individuals into long term accommodation. They have a worker to support the women in all areas from immigration, access to benefits and use different ways of finding them long term accommodation.
- 4.4.15 The women's night shelter was kept open all through the first lockdown. But has been reduced to only 5 women in the premises due to Covid and the

Greater London Authority (GLA) insisting the women having their own room. They also have a reduced team of volunteers.

- 4.4.16 Currently they have 6 women in the shelter and Since November they have housed 3 women and have had 3 more join.
- 4.4.17 In relation to the main night shelter. Since they opened on 1st November they have mainly taken men - 9 single people. Since November they have housed 3 people.
- 4.4.18 In relation to their funding. Funding has mainly been through fundraising efforts and grants for charitable trusts and foundations. To date they have not applied for any funding from Hackney Council. In addition to these funding avenues they have lots of shops and organisation who sponsor something for them.
- 4.4.19 They have not applied for or received a grant from Hackney Council. To date Hackney Doorways have sustained their operations through community and local organisation support.
- 4.4.20 In relation to their current service offer. Due to Covid they have single rooms. There is also a limit on the number of people they can have in the dining rooms at any one time.
- 4.4.21 Volunteers are working in teams and they have procedures in place for all guests and workers. They keep a spare room for people to self-isolate.
- 4.4.22 To date Hackney Doorways have kept all safe and well from Covid.
- 4.4.23 In relation to working with the Council. Most referrals come from the Greenhouse and also from other charities and homeless organisations. They are currently receiving a large number of referrals because a number of night shelters have not been able to open.
- 4.4.24 There has been close working with the Council's housing department and Hackney Doorways reported having an excellent working relationship with Hackney Housing services and the rough sleeping manager. The Council has also helped the organisation to secure Covid funding to help sustain them during the pandemic.
- 4.4.25 The Trustee pointed out next year will be more difficult financially for the organisation.

4.5 Questions Answers and Discussion

- i. **Members commented due to the reduction in the numbers and noting you cannot support as many people as you used to. Members asked how the people Hackney Doorways cannot support are being helped particularly over the winter months. Members also asked if there is extra support to help them to stay safe on the streets.**

The Trustee from Hackney Doorways advised all their referrals come from agencies. At the point of referral the individuals are usually supported by that agency. Therefore they expect the agency will continue to work with the individual to find alternative support to take them off the street.

The maximum capacity in the venue is 13 but this has been reduced to 10.

In response to Members asking what the Council can do in this situation. The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs from LBH advised in regards to rough sleeping the carried out the count approximately 2 weeks ago.

The service usually uses this count as an educational tool by having staff from other service areas participate in the count. But this year they were unable to have a large number of volunteers due to Covid. Participation in the count of rough sleepers helps people to understand the levels of support rough sleepers need. The officer pointed out a home and roof is just one are of support a rough sleeper might need.

Just over 20 people carried out this task and the Council counted 18 people bedded down in the borough that night. This is a slight increase on the last count. The officer pointed out other boroughs are seeing similar increases.

In regards to severe weather provision and the operations of Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP). The borough has seen one emergency called for one night in the borough. For this they utilised hotel rooms for that one night. In this instance the council did not need to provide an emergency shelter.

The council is in discussions with other service areas and emergency planning to consider the setup of an emergency shelter in a council building. There are a number of challenges and things they need to consider to provide this type of emergency shelter. Therefore the council is risk assessing a number of sites and have a short list of 2 under consideration.

It is not the preferred option to open a self-contained shelter due to the risks of infection. The council would be required to implement a number of things such as staffing, signage for one ways systems, additional cleaning and deep cleaning after residents have left etc. In addition to testing and screening for Covid before letting people into the premises and having security to keep people safe. In essence there are multiple things the council would need to consider to deliver this type of provision.

The Rough Sleeping Manager from LBH added in terms of people the winter night shelter cannot accommodate, if they eligible access public funds the Council will assess under the usual homeless housing revenue account (HRA) criteria and process under interim duty of care.

The challenge the council encounters is when an individual has no recourse to public funds (NRPF) or a multiple use individual (in and out of the system indicating complexity).

Currently the case load is a larger number than usual. The officer pointed out Hackney's numbers are lower than other boroughs although they are rising.

Increasingly outreach case workers on the streets are having to make judgement calls on how fit and well a person is to stay out one more night while they try to find the appropriate support for them. In summary for people they

cannot find shelter they are either case work with them on the street or find hotel rooms for them.

For rough sleepers who are unwell they go through the Covid pathway with Mildmay hospital.

Typically the other provision they have in the borough is the no second night out service provided by St Mungo's. This has been shut since the beginning of Covid due to the provision being similar to communal shelter provisions. Hackney Council has worked with the GLA about this and it reopened 6 weeks ago. This is a non-accommodation service. This means rough sleepers are referred there and they start to case work with the individuals to assist them back into the system but they do not provide accommodation. With this service back in operation they are able to move their rough sleepers off the streets quicker.

- ii. **The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply asked the winter night shelter to explain where they get referrals from and to confirm if they work beyond the borough boundary?**

In response the Trustee from Hackney Doorways confirmed a significant percentage of their service users come from Hackney. However they do also take referrals from other agencies who are on the boarder of Hackney.

- iii. **Members commended the winter night shelter for all the work they do in the borough. Members commented the key to shelter services was the follow up work they did. This model was very successful. Members asked if it is still in operation following covid.**

In response the Trustee from Hackney Doorways advised they have the same system in place. The shelter has 2 advocacy workers who work with all rough sleepers. A worker visits the women's' shelter and the main advocacy worker is based at the main shelter. Due to covid there is currently always a worker on site.

At least half of the people in winter night shelter are people with NRPF.

- iv. **Members asked if there was any reason why Hackney Doorways have not accessed funding from the Council. In regards to the stoke Newington premises Members asked if it was open and the current capacity.**

In response the Trustee from Hackney Doorways informed the capacity at the new shelter is 13 but they currently have 10.

The building is owned by another organisation and is subject to planning permission for redevelopment. The length of stay in this premises is subject to other decision making processes. However they are assured they have the premises until at least February 2021. They are currently looking for long term premises. The Trustee pointed out they had hoped to have a larger capacity because the premises has a large basement space. But following a fire assessment this spaces was deemed not suitable for anything but storage.

To date Hackney Doorways have managed so far to self-fund because operating for 5 months of the year it was difficult to get funding for short term provision.

- v. **Members referred to the rehousing of 3 men and 3 women. Members asked how they have managed to rehouse these individuals. Members referred to the long term vision and it becoming a year round provision and asked what would be the difference between their provision and a hostel? Members also asked what will be in place of the winter night shelter. This was seen as a last resort safety net for individuals in the winter period.**

In response the Trustee from Hackney Doorways explained 2 women moved to private sector housing out of the borough and one received accommodation with employment.

In relation to the men they have moved 7 men since November 2020. 3 moved to immigration accommodation. 1 has moved into a shared house and 3 have moved into long term private sector accommodation including a hostel.

In terms of dealing with people who became homeless at winter time. They are anticipating that being open all year round they will pick up people earlier than just in the winter period so they are not homeless in the winter. Therefore anticipating there will not be a crisis in the winter months.

- vi. **Members asked if referrals could be made from a walk in or only through a referral organisation. To enable members of the public to support people into accessing the shelter Members asked what the most common routes of access for people who are homeless.**

In response the Trustee from Hackney Doorways confirmed they are not an open access service but a referral service only. This ensures if they do say no or they do not meet their criteria they will still be supported by the referral organisation to find an alternative provision.

The Chair thanked Hackney Doorways for attending the meeting.

5 Homelessness and the Impact of Covid-19

- 5.1 In attendance at the meeting for this item from London Borough of Hackney was Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply, Cllr Rebecca Rennison; Head of Benefits and Housing Needs, Jennifer Wynter and Rough Sleeping Manager, Sabrina Pathan.
- 5.2 The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply commended Hackney Doorways for reviewing their operating model and constantly challenging themselves to do better. Pointing out this is not common practice in the voluntary sector. The Cabinet Member also commended their finance model of independence and in building up a base of individual donors.
- 5.3 The Cabinet Member thanked all the staff supporting rough sleepers and their work on the Council's homelessness response to the pandemic.

- 5.4 The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs commenced the presentation making the following main points:
- 5.4.1 Hackney's approach to homelessness was one step ahead of the Government.
 - 5.4.2 Prior to covid the Council was monitoring this situation and the Rough Sleeping Manager and her team took the decision to bring people in before the Government made their announcement.
 - 5.4.3 The officer pointed out whilst doing this piece of work the service has been trying to still run a business as usual service for all other service provisions.
 - 5.4.4 Covid has impacted on the operation of hostels requiring the operation of hostels to be different. The Council has continued to provide the households in temporary accommodation (TA) with access to hostel caretakers and hostel managers to provide support and additional cleaning. The TA placement team have also worked closely with adult social care to ensure where they have households in TA that were shielding or vulnerable they are supported too.
 - 5.4.5 The council has received a significant increase in enquires. Throughout covid they have seen less enquires from families with children and more from single people.
 - 5.4.6 The Council's Greenhouse is still operating - the council's single person's service. Albeit a virtual service.
 - 5.4.7 The covid work with rough sleepers was prioritised and given a high profile. Achieving corporate input and support from: strategic property services, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and primary care, public health, adult social care and commissioning, finance, community partnerships, housing strategy etc. The partnership still meet weekly and there is a programme of work categorised into short, medium and longer term work streams. This group reports to Hackney Management Team (HMT) gold monthly. This work now sits under the Health and Care and Community Support work stream. This recognises that rough sleeping is not just about homelessness but supporting people too.
- 5.5 The Rough Sleeping Manager added information about the 'Everybody In' work by the Council.
- 5.5.1 Prior to covid Hackney Council had booked hotel rooms. The Council booked 2 large settings where they could also provide support services too. It was pointed out this cohort not only needs housing but support services too.
 - 5.5.2 This took time to achieve but within a week they found their regular rough sleepers and took them in. The next challenge was staffing. The officer pointed out following a number of years of cuts this had impacted on the service sectors that they would use to work with vulnerable people. As a result finding experienced staff with the knowledge and skills to work with this cohort was extremely difficult. In the end the Council used redeployed staff from within the council to help the service.

- 5.5.3 The emergency support set up was unsustainable so the Council commissioned the Single Homeless Project (SHP) to provide support services.
- 5.5.4 At the start of the pandemic Hackney Council housed 219 people across 11 hotels. This was for rough sleepers and any individuals that approached the council as homeless. This therefore covered a range of needs. Through this work they managed to bring in individuals who had previously refused to engage with the systems.
- 5.5.5 Hackney Council reported the vast majority stayed in for a long time and since coming in staff have commented that at least 4 people look different and are behaving differently. The officer explained these are human beings with human stories and they were pleased with the progress some had made. Highlighting there are people they have managed to engage with support services who had previously refused. This has given people self-respect and the belief they can do more with their lives. The officer commended all staff involved in this work.
- 5.5.6 The officer pointed out the underlying issues that are the drivers for these problems still remain - the current emergency is contained as much as possible – as they cannot change the political and policy landscape that can be unkind to people at times.
- 5.5.7 The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs added the ‘Everyone in’ was combined with the hospital discharge process. They achieved the challenge of housing residents with just a 2 hour turnaround time into hotels. This was achieved with the assistance of staff, volunteers, Age UK and support providers. The officer commended all staff involved in this work.
- 5.5.8 The Council’s investment in the Greenhouse model has been very beneficial in the crisis. There has been a health assessment of each person and this identified that in Hackney they are bucking the trend. Amongst their rough sleepers Hackney has approximately 80% registered with a GPs and linked into primary care services. The common trend is close to 30% across London. The officer pointed out getting rough sleepers into in with health services provides the best foundation for keeping rough sleepers engaged with services and accessing the health system.
- 5.5.9 The Rough Sleeping Manager explained Hackney’s approach is to inform them of their rights and taking a rights based approach. Rough sleepers have a right to healthcare and upon initial contact one of the first tasks they seek to do is to get the individual registered with a GP.
- 5.5.10 The Chair commented Hackney Council does not promote the good work of the Greenhouse model. The Chair urged the council to think about its communication strategy in relation to promoting all the good work they do to other boroughs. The chair wanted to see Hackney council better publicise Hackney’s visionary work. Pointing out other boroughs claim successes that Hackney has been doing for years.
- 5.6 The Head of Benefit and Housing Needs continued the presentation.
- 5.6.1 Rough sleeping is a symptom of poor health and they have been doing more joined up working with health colleagues. The officer provided details of what was achieved in Hackney under the guise of prevention, possible and no

- second wave from a health prospective. *(Full details are on slide 5 of the Homelessness presentation).*
- 5.6.2 They encountered challenges with doing this work such as no clear supply chain for PPE, no access to water for rough sleepers on the streets as parks were shut. Officers were working in an environment where they had to find solutions rapidly. (Full details of the challenges they encountered is on Slide 6 of the presentation).
 - 5.6.3 The rough sleeping team did daily tracking and monitoring and trailing new approaches as they worked. But these are only interim solutions not long term. All rough sleepers have various levels of need.
 - 5.6.4 Data sharing was a big challenge that they overcame. They had various health interactions and this was really challenging to manage.
 - 5.6.5 The current phase is now 'in for good'. As things start to return to a new normal and the rental market started to reopen, landlords started to offer properties and virtual viewings. This enable them to move residents with lower level needs into properties private sector.
 - 5.6.6 At the start of this pandemic the council was housing 219 individuals and as of last week this figure dropped to 80 individuals.
 - 5.6.7 The majority of the 80 individuals left have high level support needs. These individuals are likely to need supported accommodation and not general housing.
 - 5.6.8 Approximately 10-15 have very high support needs and currently there is no supported accommodation scheme in the borough that meets the needs of this cohort. This was a gap identified early. In response the Council bid for money from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and Greater London Authority (GLA) to develop their own scheme to support this cohort. The council has commissioned SHP to be their support provider in the one hotel support unit created. This client group is in for good. Working with this cohort takes a long time and will require long term input.
 - 5.6.9 All the supported housing within the borough is full and there are waiting list for all the single people sleeping pathways for accommodation. The council is working with commissioners and providers to move people on.
 - 5.6.10 Out of the 80 in for good half are NRPF individuals. As this is a corporate service the decision was taken to continue to support these individuals and commission immigration services to provide support in regularising their status.
 - 5.6.11 During covid the numbers of NRPF rose rapidly. Prior to covid the number of NRPF were low in the borough. The council anticipates this rise may be due to the slowdown of the construction and hospitality sector and loss of informal living arrangements. The council is limited in what the law allows them to do for this cohort. The council's approach is a rights based approach. Right to regularised status, nationality etc. The aim of this service is to provide formal credited advice.

- 5.6.12 The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply added the Council is against NRPF and has written to the Government about this because NRPF is inhuman. In response the Government has chosen to remind the council the hostile environment remains in place.
- 5.6.13 In regards to funding and finding a long term solution the council is extremely frustrated with the inability to plan beyond 1 year. They do not have the ability to draw down large sums of money instead they have to access small pots that have to work together. In addition to the time it takes to develop bids that may not get granted or that they only receive half of the funding they bid for.
- 5.6.14 The council has been receiving funding for the next steps accommodation funding and rough sleeping accommodation funding. The key area of challenge for Hackney is accommodation. The council received funding for one out of the 3 they bided for.
- 5.6.15 There are additional funding streams they are still waiting to hear about. It was noted the out of hospital funding stream was released with a 2 week turnaround. Further details are outlined on slide 10 of the presentation.
- 5.6.16 The officer pointed out bids are made in tandem with other organisations and these are pulled together through the Hackney Homeless Partnership.
- 5.6.17 The council has received funding to help deliver a scheme for £2.2 million. This will put towards leasing and refurbishment two hotels to be converted into enhanced supported accommodation for the next five years.
- 5.6.18 The Council did not receive funding for the women's homeless hostel. Now looking for future funding to help with this and will need to find a new premises.
- 5.6.19 Some properties became available for sale from housing associations. The council did not receive funding to buy back ex council properties. This funding was declined by the GLA. The council is still looking at long term solutions and waiting for additional funding streams to come out from Government.
- 5.6.20 For this financial year the cost of 'everyone in' and 'in for good' for rough sleeping has been in excess of £3.2 million. The council has acquired some funding to cover the costs from funding streams released. Resulting in the net cost to the council being approximately £1million.
- 5.6.21 The Council has participated in a large piece of work with the London School Economics commissioned by London Councils. This report shows that it costs approximately £21k per person to take a person off the street and house them in emergency accommodation and support through to settled accommodation.
- 5.6.22 The main drivers for homelessness pre date covid and will still exist after covid. The legislation that is protecting private renters ends in March 2021. The Council is unable to predict what will happen once rent restrictions are lifted by the Government. Estimates from various national reports puts rent arrears for the private and social housing sector at 60%-80%. No estimates have been provided at a regional or local level.

- 5.6.23 In relation to the picture of homelessness next year they are unable to give an estimate. The Council is aware there has been a large impact on unemployment in the borough and high levels of universal credit claims. Therefore the council is making sure the housing needs service is robust and as resilient as possible. There are call for the higher levels of universal credit payments to remain in place covid. There is also uncertainty about the impact of brexit on homelessness.
- 5.6.24 The Covid Act increased the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. The Government announced they will not return LHA rates to previous levels but these will be frozen. However the benefit cap was not increased resulting in more people reaching the benefit cap. In Hackney this impacted more on single people and large families.
- 5.6.25 The key asks would include long term funding and to see the provision of rough sleeping included in statutory provision. Homelessness needs long term solutions.
- 5.6.26 Hackney Council has a housing first pilot with health partners. This is the first CCG funded housing first pilot in the whole country. This has 20 units of accommodation and the aim is to expand this. The council will include this ask in future bids. This is a model the council thinks works and they would like to continue.

5.7 Questions, Discussion and Comments

- i. **Member commended the work of staff and their passion and desire to help people on the streets and giving them back their dignity.**
- ii. **In relation to sharing best practice Cllr Lynch informed she had approached the CCG Chair and Hackney Council Finance Director about doing a presentation to NHS England about the wider integrated work in Hackney. Following the publication of the integrated care policy this presents an opportunity to share best practice. The Member suggested the work of the housing Needs service is included in this presentation.**
- iii. **Members commented the integrated care vision includes joint commissioning. Members asked what will the outcomes of the joint working in the future in relation to the joint policy direction produced.**

In response the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs informed the Commission the service has hosted a health and homelessness event in the borough. In attendance at this event was approximately 200 people from homeless and charities, health partners, commissioners, GPs etc. This was the foundation of their joint working. This led to further partnering work for health integrated pathways, funding bids and piloting social workers in the hospital and housing needs services. The officer pointed out from her attendance at regional meetings Hackney is further advanced compared to other boroughs in relation to the joint working with health partners.

- iv. **Members referred to the cost of £21k per person to help house a homeless and commented this was a very small sum for the nation to help abolish homelessness. Members also commented the work**

highlights that it is not just about housing (a roof over their head) but their health and mental health needs too.

- v. **The Member echoed the need for Hackney to better communicate their work and to continue lobbying and calling to account the Government's failure.**

In response the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Members for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply from LBH pointed out sharing what they do is one aspect but there needs to be more conversations that broaden the understanding of the complexity of the outreach work. There are many quotes that just say can you give them a bed. The Cabinet Members always points out that at the height of the pandemic there was still 6 people who would not come into accommodation. This highlights the complexity of the work and that it not just about a bed. It will involve changing the patterns of behaviour which will take a long time to solve.

Members agreed just providing a bed does not solve all the problems. Unsupported care for rough sleeping is not the answer.

- vi. **Members asked what happened in the second lockdown and will London moving into tier 3 make a difference from being in tier 2.**

In response the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs agreed the second lockdown was not as severe as the first.

Throughout the year they have seen an increasing number of new rough sleepers on the street. The outreach team have been finding them quickly and linking them to services. They are starting to see a slight decrease but Hackney is still monitoring and waiting for the outcome in the new year.

The officer pointed out Hackney's service is not just the basic offer and they have staff with higher skill levels delivering a high offer than the standard offer by other councils. Taking a trauma based approach to engaging with rough sleepers.

- vii. **Member asked how people can report a rough sleeper. The Member reported using Streetlink but not getting any report back. Members wanted to know the avenue to report rough sleeping.**

In response the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Members for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply from LBH confirmed Streetlink was the best route to report rough sleeping. The Cabinet Member reassured Members the report comes through to Hackney Council's outreach team.

- viii. **In regards to financing Members commended the service in being cost efficient and seeking out and tapping into various funding streams to reduce the costs to the council.**

In response the Rough Sleeping Manager thanked the staff in her service area (Ian and Ross) who write the bids.

The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs pointed out their colleagues in strategic property services have been really good negotiators and helped to secure good rates for the temporary accommodation during the pandemic. They are hoping to secure further good rates for future deals to make them cost effective.

- ix. **Members suggested the key action following this meeting was to communicate the great partnership work and what Hackney Council has achieved. Members pointed out this work would ordinarily take 2 years to achieve and Hackney Council has completed it in a very short space of time. Commending all the staff within the team for their hard work.**
- x. **Members referred to the work of 'Everyone in' and asked how the Council will take forward the lessons learnt?**
- xi. **Members referred to the Government announcement to remove foreign nationals from services. In reference to no second night out being back in operation. Members asked if they still have a criteria.**
- xii. **Members referred to the commissioning of the Single homeless Project (SHP) and asked why the council did not commission St Mungo's who currently provide the single homeless persons support in the borough.**

In response the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs advised the homelessness capacity within the borough had decreased. The GLA relied on St Mungos and Thames Reach to deliver the London wide capacity. This meant St Mungo's had no capacity to deliver borough level work. So commissioning the Single Homeless Project (SHP) was next best option and this provider does not currently provide support services in the borough and they had capacity and could set up quickly.

In response to the question about the home office announcement. The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply advised this was similar to a previous policy ruled illegal. Everyone in and this policy contradict each other. To add more complexity the Government has advised this should be the last resort after all other avenues have been exhausted. It was pointed out all avenues for rough sleepers with NRPF have been shut down.

In response the Rough Sleeping Manager advised with no second night out (NSNO) this has been beneficial for the council and they do struggle with the criteria. But they recognise they have to have one. This is no more than 1 night with them. The NSNO will seek out local connections to put people on the right pathway.

In relation to the lessons learnt. This may not be revealed for a year or two. However the officer did notice that there was a connection where people were in with other individuals they usually engaged with on the streets. People felt comfortable.

The Council has also been approached by Cardiff University to take part in research to follow people who were taken into covid hotels to track their journey to settled accommodation. Hackney is one of the boroughs participating in this

work. Reports will be released for 3 months, 6 months and 12 months. This should provide some information to glean some learning from this pandemic.

- xiii. **Members commented rough sleeping is not specific to Hackney and London wide. Members asked what can be done to reduce rough sleeping in partnership with other councils. Members also asked if there is any research that explains why rough sleeping is increasing.**

In response the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs from LBH explained they have a shared health trust with the City of London and their rough sleeping numbers are quite high and they have increased significantly. The officer pointed out compared to their neighbouring boroughs Hackney's increase has been quite small.

Looking at sub regional bids. The recent sub regional bid was for all East London boroughs but central Government asked them to reduce the bid to £200k. This shows the Government is not looking at this holistically, for solutions or at the drivers but salami slicing funding.

The provision for rough sleeping across the boroughs is not equitable and Hackney's service is further advanced. Sub -regional bids are about raising the standards across the board.

The council will continue to attend pan London meetings to discuss initiatives and bench mark weekly on rough sleeping figures and those in hotels.

The council is also doing financial lobbying through their connection with the President of the Society of London Treasurers using their research to show the costs to provide solutions.

Members comments the Government is not taking homelessness seriously and that homelessness could be solved if they make the commitment needed to resolve it.

6 Lettings Policy

- 6.1 In attendance at the meeting for this item from London Borough of Hackney was Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply, Cllr Rebecca Rennison; Head of Benefits and Housing Needs, Jennifer Wynter and Operations Manager, Marcia Facey.
- 6.2 The Chair pointed out the consultation for the lettings policy launched on 14th December 2020. The Commission asked for an update about the new lettings policy and the planned consultation on the new policy.
- 6.3 The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs commenced the presentation making the following main points:
- 6.3.1 Demand for social housing has grown significantly within the borough.
- 6.3.2 The council identified its current lettings policy is no longer fit for purpose.

- 6.3.3 The new policy is in response to the Mayor's manifesto commitment to review how they allocate properties and ensure the system is as fair and effective as possible.
- 6.3.4 The new policy is a radical overall. The officer pointed out that piecemeal changes to the system have not addressed the issues and made the current policy quite difficult to understand and overly complex for residents.
- 6.3.5 The aim is to ensure the new policy is not miss leading or disingenuous. The service has a statutory duty to provide effective and genuine housing advice. Any lettings policy needs to align with this duty and not appear to be disingenuous.
- 6.3.6 The current scheme has encouraged a race to get into the urgent band. This has led residents to think they need to demonstrate they are disadvantaged to get on the council's housing register.
- 6.3.7 There is currently 13,400 households on the register. There has been a steady increase in the percentage of households on the housing register that are considered to be in acute need - from 18% in 2014 up to 34%.
- 6.3.8 The council has found that more households are presenting with multiple and complex housing and support needs. Homelessness levels are also increasing. The number of approaches to the council in 2018-19 went up by 39%.
- 6.3.9 The Council has had its highest level of homeless households in temporary accommodation for a decade. This is currently 3300 households. They also have 183 households seeking wheelchair accessible housing. In the last year only 4 properties meeting this need became available.
- 6.3.10 The Council has 656 households on the London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR). These are households requiring either a ground floor, level access shower or level access throughout. In 2019/20 only 60 properties became available.
- 6.3.11 The current allocations policy is struggling with the current demand.
- 6.3.12 The council reported for every 100 properties they have 11,000 bids. This is a lot of hope and disappointment in these bids. *Slide 5 provides a graphically illustration of the level of demand to properties available.*
- 6.3.13 The council reported the number of social properties to let had diminished significantly. The key drivers for this were outlined in slide 5. Highlighted to be:
- Right to buy
 - Regeneration Decants
 - Rehousing demand (ASB / DA / Gangs / Management transfers etc)
 - Tenants living longer
 - No affordable alternatives
 - Decrease in building new social housing units.

- 6.3.14 Slide 5 also provided a graphical demonstration of the number of properties available to the number of associated applications for those properties. Giving a clear picture of demand verses available properties.
- 6.3.15 The council advised to give residents a clearer understanding of the waiting times they have been working on a tool to demonstrate estimates. The council has a waiting time tool which is available on the council website. This is accessible to residents on the housing register. This tool will tell the resident where they are on the register and how long they will be waiting. This is based on real time information over the past 12 months of the housing register.
- 6.3.16 Slide 7 of the presentation demonstrated the waiting times for each category if the housing register was closed on 24th July 2020.
- 6.3.17 These graphical illustrations showed the larger the property needed the longer the wait time and this also depended on the individual's circumstance. The waiting time increases if their needs are lower than the urgent or higher bands.
- 6.3.18 The council reported the biggest demand currently was for 1 and 2 bed properties but generally they needed a good supply of all property sizes.
- 6.3.19 The principles for new policy is that it is a service which is easily *understood, fair, accessible* and *beneficial* to their residents. *Further details about the principles were outlined on slide 8 of the presentation.* The aim is to ensure the lettings policy and allocations of social housing is seen as one of a range of options within housing options.
- 6.3.20 The consultation period for the new lettings policy is currently live for 12 weeks and will close at the end of March 2021.
- 6.3.21 The new policy will have only the categories with the highest need on the new housing register. This criteria will include those lacking 2 or more bedrooms; having significant medical needs - where the applicant or someone in their household is housebound within it or there is a pronounced impact on the wellbeing of the applicant or someone in their household; having significant social need - where there is a threat to the life/pronounced impact on the wellbeing of the applicant (or someone in their household) and there is no alternative effective remedy other than moving from the accommodation.
- 6.3.22 The council is proposing to have a simpler system of 3 bands (A-C). This is down from the current number of 5 bands.
- 6.3.23 The new policy will remove disingenuous language such as urgent band. Because this does not deliver an urgent solution to an individual's housing needs.
- 6.3.24 Band A will be for people who need emergency housing. This will be a settled housing offer not temporary accommodation. The household will receive a onetime offer.
- 6.3.25 Band B is for significant need either medical or social.

- 6.3.26 Band C is for those who need to be on the housing register to access certain types of properties. For example this could be for sheltered or older person's accommodation. These properties are only accessible through the council's housing register.
- 6.3.27 In relation to choice based lettings. The ability to bid for households in bands B and C will remain. The Council is proposing an emergency onetime direct offer for Band A. This should speed up the lettings process and they can pass the property onto the next person on the list quite quickly.
- 6.3.28 Prioritisation will continue to be based on the application date.
- 6.3.29 For applicants that do not qualify to join the new housing register they will receive support and advice to address their needs through alternative options.
- 6.3.30 The Council anticipates the new housing register will have fewer households - approximately 7000. This is roughly half of the current level but will give those applicants left on the register a reasonable chance of being housed.
- 6.3.31 For the applicants that remain on the register the waiting times will still be the same. This is because waiting times are dependent on supply. The supply of properties is not controlled by the lettings policy.
- 6.3.32 The council will continue to minimise fraud and error by more frequent, effective and targeted reviews of the register.
- 6.3.33 The council anticipates the new register will take less resources to manage and administer. Thus providing more assistance and support to people who will not be housed via the housing register.
- 6.3.34 The council outlined housing solutions in slide 12. This offer will be providing:
- Personalised Housing Advice offering wrap-around support
 - Working with other colleagues in the council operating a strengths-based approach with a neighbourhood focus
 - Support to access the private rented sector for households who will not secure social housing.
 - Enhanced Mutual Exchange offering tenancy support. Working with colleagues in housing associations and Hackney Housing to have realistic conversations with residents who may be overcrowded or who have older children and assisting them to access long term accommodation solution
 - Provide a team of dedicated downsizing officers. To support people to find appropriate accommodation for their size who need extra support to go through the process and settle.
- 6.3.35 In relation to the consultation the Council has sent every household on the housing register a letter explaining what is happening and about the consultation process. This will direct them to the online form. Paper forms will be available upon request.
- 6.3.36 For this consultation the Council will be doing face to face and virtual session, online Q&A sessions and has an online consultation form on Citizen Space.

6.3.37 The Council will have a series of engagement events from January – February 2021. In addition to meetings with the Council’s Resident Liaison Group and tenant associations.

6.3.38 There will be general resident engagement sessions and people can sign up to these.

6.4 The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member Finance, Housing Needs and Supply added the following information.

6.4.1 The Cabinet Member thanked staff for all their work on this policy over the last 2 years and their evidence gathering to support the policy.

6.4.2 Highlighted this policy is not changing who gets a council property but about having a more honest system and realistic conversations.

6.4.3 The Cabinet Member pointed out there are two things to bear in mind.

- 1) Doing nothing is not an option. There are families whose children will grow up and leave home before they reach their point on the list. This is to reduce false expectations
- 2) Secondly this is not about savings but about releasing resources to invest more in providing residents with an enhanced support.

6.5 Questions, Discussions and Comments

- i. **In reference to the point about the number of social lets properties that become available. Members asked for clarification if this figure included council properties and registered social landlords (RSLs) in the borough.**

The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs from LBH confirmed this was making reference to all social housing available in the borough – social lets for council and all the housing associations in the borough.

- ii. **Members commented these changes will come as a shock to many people on the existing housing register. Members asked what support will be given to people currently on the register who will not be on the new housing register. Members pointed out they may be concerned about going into private sector housing due to the costs, low LHA rates and being put in a position that encourages you to remain on benefits to make sure their rent is paid.**

The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs from LBH agreed this is a sentiment they have heard. As a result of covid there has been a complete U-turn in behaviour from landlords. The officer pointed out as a result of covid they have seen a shift in landlords mind set about tenants in receipt of benefits. Landlords are viewing tenants on benefits as more secure.

In relation to the people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. The numbers in work have increased. There is now approximately 80% of households in TA in work. This is a higher number than the households in social housing and in work for both council and RSL properties.

The officer pointed out there has been a lot of change around economics, rent costs and the effect on people.

The officer informed it is the Council's role to smooth the pathways and make conversations realistic. It was pointed out there are a number of housing schemes open and available to people in social housing. E.g. fresh start, seaside and country home etc. In addition to a number of mutual exchange schemes that can work within the council and that work on a pan London basis and between registered providers and councils - housing moves, home finders. There are schemes where people can access social housing outside the borough too. Hackney has been some success with people taking other options.

The officer advised there are people on the register who have not had conversations about their housing needs, future plans and who are sitting on the register bidding. By implementing the new policy this will enable the council to free up some resources to have those conversations with people.

The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply added affordability is something that affects people not on the register as well. There is the LHA up lift which has provided more options particular for households in work when it comes to the private sector. Through feedback having had those conversations the service has heard people are happy and settled after looking at the options available and having those conversations.

- iii. **Members asked if the lettings policy being introduced was only applicable to Hackney or would it apply to other boroughs too.**
- iv. **Members asked how the council was addressing and managing language barriers and suggested the consultation could have engagement sessions in different languages to address the language barriers.**
- v. **Members agreed it was not acceptable to have people on a waiting list knowing they will not get a social let property. It was good to have these honest conversations. Members commented there are people who may not want to come off the housing list and wish to remain on the register in the hope of getting a social housing property. Members also raised concern about people not wanting to go into the private sector due to the higher risks of insecurity of housing and having a bad landlord. Members pointed out the legislation in place is not sufficient to help people hold onto their homes in the private sector.**
- vi. **Members pointed out the consultation is likely to receive hostility because people know they will be taken off the housing list. How is the council planning to prepare and respond to this?**

The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs from LBH confirmed the letting policy was only applicable to Hackney borough. Although other boroughs have been revising and reviewing their lettings policy too.

In regards to households over crowded by 1 bed. Although the council sympathises, it is important that they have realistic conversation and help people to understand that sitting on the housing register will not get them social housing and is not a solution to being overcrowded by 1 bedroom. Highlighting

There options do not have to be a move into the private sector but could be a mutual exchange.

There are approximately 45,000 units of social housing in the borough, of which many are overcrowded but equally they have quite a few under occupied properties. There has not been a large amount of activity through joined up mechanisms in the borough to enable transfers and mutual exchanges among registered providers. This an area the housing strategy team, housing needs team and neighbourhoods and housing teams will be working on next year. They propose to hold social housing fairs to encourage swaps and enable people to see what is available. This is an example of a new trail that could be delivered as solutions for people in Hackney.

The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply added they would not be encouraging people to come out of social housing into the private sector. But it should be noted there are people on the register and not in social housing. Having those conversations and looking at the properties available could be a solution.

In relation to the consultation they are being really honest about what this means. They want a two way conversation. But the reality is they cannot continue with the current system as is not sustainable. If there are other models recommended or other priorities they need to take into consideration they would encourage this to be provided in the feedback.

The Operations Manager for LBH added in regards to downsizing they had a dedicated team and they were successful in downsizing. This was eroded due to various duties. This team achieved 158 moves per year. They worked alongside the RSLs in the borough. They will be setting this up again and will be meeting in January 2021.

- vii. **Members made reference to there being a review. Members asked if the review will be a review of the person's circumstances.**

The Operations Manager from LBH explained they would carry out a review after 2 years. If in band B they would review the current application.

- viii. **Members asked if the council will be stricter on making people accept the RSL option. Pointing out there may be people holding out for a council property because they want to access the right to buy option. Members also asked if the council tracked the people who were in the urgent band but then did a right to buy application.**

The Operations Manager from LBH advised the council does not track the right to buy when a tenant has come through the homeless route to a property.

The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs from LBH advised there is some monitoring within housing services from the fraud unit. The officer is aware there has been more right to buy applications refused this year than previously due to this work.

In relation to accepting a property offer. All homeless applicants when made an offer get sent an offer letter outlining all the statutory requirements and

advises if this is rejected the council can discharge its duty. An officer usually attends the viewing with the applicant. All offers are classified as social housing regardless if the landlord is the council or an RSL.

- ix. **Members asked for the consultation to be issued in different languages.**
- x. **The Chair closed this discussion by making the following points:**
 - **It was a good suggestions to translate the consultation into local community languages**
 - **Members understood the need for the changes following the period of austerity and cuts to house building.**
 - **Members are aware Hackney Council is trying to build more homes but the council has limited access to funds to build homes for social let.**

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 7.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9th November 2020 were approved.

RESOLVED: Minutes were approved
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8 Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission- 2020/2021 Work Programme

- 8.1 The work programme for the LiH scrutiny commission was not reviewed or discussed.

9 Any Other Business

- 9.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 10.00 pm