

# Hackney Council

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Members briefing  
Housing Register Software

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

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### Background

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

### Vision

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

### Outcomes we're driving through the new system:

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

# Some of the main challenges we were facing

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

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

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

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

**Unable to focus on the most complex and vulnerable cases**

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

**Compromised systems**

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

## The opportunity

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

And we wanted to build a tool that would;

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

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# The tool : resident facing form

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

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

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

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

## Application complete

Your reference:  
HDJ2123F

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

## What happens next

### Application submitted

Thursday 29 April 2021

### Application review

We aim to review applications within two weeks.

### Medical checks

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

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# The tool : admin interface

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

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

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

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

The screenshot displays the 'View application' page for 'Mr Joe Bloggs (+2 others)'. The page header includes the Hackney Housing Register logo and navigation links for 'Firstname Surname' and 'Sign out'. A breadcrumb trail shows '< Back to worktray'. A 'View documents' button is located in the top right corner. Below the application title, there are tabs for 'Household overview' (selected), 'Notes and history', and 'Actions'. The page is divided into two columns: 'Snapshot' and 'Case details'. The 'Snapshot' section contains a paragraph describing the household composition and a 'Main applicant' section for Mr Joe Bloggs, including his details (Applicant, Male, 13/12/90, age 30), medical need, and contact information. A 'To do' button with an 'Open' sub-button is present. The 'Case details' section includes 'Application reference' (21006-34525), 'Status' (Awaiting assessment), 'Application date' (28 May 2021), and an 'Assigned to' dropdown menu. Below this, the 'Other household members' section lists Ms Josie Bloggs (Partner, Female, 18/02/93, age 28) and Mx Junior Bloggs (Child, Non binary, 10/05/09, age 12), both with 'To do' and 'Open' buttons.

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# Demo

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

## What to expect

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

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

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

[Save and continue](#)

[Cancel this application](#)

### Help

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

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

[Application](#) > Jane

Complete information for:  
**Jane Doe**

### Identity

[Personal details](#) Completed

[Immigration status](#) To do

### Health

Medical needs Can't start yet

### Living situation

Residential status Can't start yet

Address history Can't start yet

Current accommodation Can't start yet

Your situation Can't start yet



# Demo

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

We will demo;

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

## Reflections on the tool

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

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

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

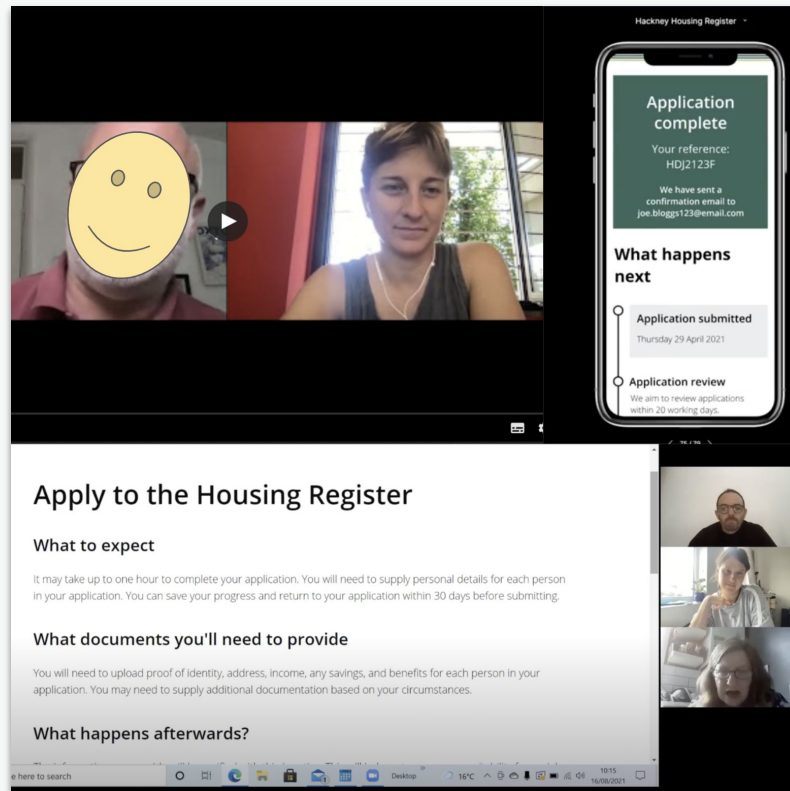
*"The design feels familiar, like applying for a covid test or doing my taxes. I'm used to the questions and format so can zip through it. Great!" - Resident*

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

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

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

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



The image is a composite of three elements illustrating the user testing process for the Hackney Housing Register. At the top, a video call interface shows two participants: one with a yellow smiley face overlay and another woman. To the right, a smartphone displays the 'Hackney Housing Register' app with a green 'Application complete' message, a reference number 'HDJ2123F', and a confirmation email. Below the smartphone, a desktop screen shows the 'Apply to the Housing Register' form, which includes sections for 'What to expect', 'What documents you'll need to provide', and 'What happens afterwards?'. The desktop screen also features a small video call window in the bottom right corner with three participants. The desktop taskbar at the bottom shows the date as 10:15 on 14/06/2021.

## What we want to track and why

### Indicators of success

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

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## Next steps

### How Might We . . .

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

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