

Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

22nd March 2023

Report of Members' Site Visits to Temporary Accommodation Settings

Members undertook site visits to temporary accommodation settings in the borough on the morning of Tuesday 28th February 2023.

The aim of the site visits was to gain a further understanding of the standard of temporary accommodation in the borough, as well as to hear about some of the experiences of residents, staff and temporary accommodation providers.

A number of temporary accommodation hostels were visited including those managed by both the Council and external providers, those catering for different households including both families and single people, and those supporting households with a range of vulnerabilities and needs.

The site visits were attended by Members of the Commission, the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture, the Mayoral Advisor for Housing Needs and Homelessness and relevant Council Officers.

During the visits, Members had the opportunity to look around the hostels and inside accommodation units, as well as to speak with residents, hostel managers, officers, caretakers and provider staff.

Insights from the site visits are summarised below.

Suitability

- **Location**
 - The Council takes into account transport links and accessibility/availability of essential services appropriate to household needs.
 - However, where there is a lack of suitable accommodation in Hackney or there are higher priority households awaiting accommodation, out of borough placements are used.
 - The Council considers the proximity to schools, public transport, primary care services, GPs and local services in the area in which the accommodation is located.

- **Affordability**
 - The Council determines the affordability of a property to a tenant based on their specific circumstances.
 - Generally the households will have its equivalent level of income support or Universal Credit available to spend on living costs after accommodation costs have been deducted.

- If the household is subject to the benefit cap this will also be taken into consideration when assessing the income available to them.
- **Impact upon employment, education and caring responsibilities**
 - Where households include a child or children of school age the proximity of the child or children's school is considered.
 - The Council considers the need of households who are in employment to reach their normal workplace from the accommodation.
- **Impact on health and safety**
 - The Council considers health factors, such as the ability to manage stairs, care and support provided by agencies or the need to access specialist medical service nearby.
 - For households who are victims of domestic violence and abuse priority is given to a Council owned hostel with 24 hour security provision.

Habitability

- **Disrepair**
 - There was concern over dampness and lack of ventilation in some accommodation, and a feeling that some accommodation may not adequately protect households from the elements due to building defects.
 - There was an understanding that it is the landlord's responsibility to make repairs, but there were concerns around their proactivity and actions to reduce risk of disrepair, waits for repairs and how easy it is to report issues.
- **Lack of adequate space**
 - There was a concern over a lack of adequate space in some accommodation, which can be compounded by lengthy stays e.g. unfit for children to play and enjoy recreational time and difficult for children to concentrate or find a quiet environment to do their work.
 - There were concerns that a lack of access to communal spaces in some accommodation may lead to negative social/health issues, and a feeling that some accommodation does not have adequate access to outside and/or green spaces on site or in close proximity.
- **Access to bathroom, toilet and kitchen facilities**
 - There were concerns in some accommodation that shared facilities are locked or only open during certain times of the day, which may pose issues for those that work irregular hours for example.
 - There was a feeling that shared facilities in some accommodation were too small to cater for the number of households using them, which may become a real issue for those that are in accommodation for an extended period of time.
- **Mobility and disability accessibility**
 - There were concerns that some accommodation may not be accessible to those with mobility issues and those with small children, though assurance

was given that households were generally placed with consideration to mobility and accessibility needs.

- **Visitors and personal callers**

- There were concerns over restrictions around visitors and personal callers, although requests are considered in exceptional circumstances e.g. short notice childcare needs and hospital appointments.
- There was a feeling that restrictions on visitors and personal callers can have detrimental social/health impacts, whilst recognising the need to ensure the safety and security of households.

Support after being placed

- **Joined up working between agencies and providers**

- There was concern that information held by agencies is not always being highlighted to hostel staff in a timely manner (particularly concerning in cases of complex and multiple needs), although there is an understanding that issues are not always known and are brought to light as trust is built with households.

- **Pressure on hostel managers/caretakers/provider staff**

- There was encouragement in the practical and wraparound support provided by hostel staff and the relationships they develop with households, although there was concern around just how much they were picking up and the challenge of increasingly complex needs.

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