

Questions from Members of the public that were not responded to at the meeting.

7.7 From Cllr Garbett to the Deputy Cabinet Member for Private Rented Sector and Affordability

What is the average time and the longest time it has taken for applications for landlord licensing to be processed, and how many are waiting to be Processed?

Response from the Deputy Cabinet Member for Private Rented Sector and Affordability (Deputy Mayor Nicholson responding)

Thank you for tabling your question at November's Full Council concerning landlord licensing in Hackney. It was unfortunate that the time allocated for answering Member's Questions expired before we reached your question. I was asked to answer your question on behalf of my colleague Cllr Moema, hence the written response to your question coming from myself.

As you and other Councillors are aware Hackney Council has long campaigned for better housing standards in the Private Rented Sector and has supported Hackney's private renters realise their right to an affordable and good quality home.

The number of households in Hackney privately renting continues to rise and has doubled over the course of the last decade. The most recent housing led survey identified that 30% of households in Hackney now live in the private rented sector, which equates to approximately 34,000 homes.

In October 2018, Hackney Council implemented a pilot Selective Private Landlord Licensing scheme covering three wards in the borough. The scheme fell below the threshold requiring permission from the Secretary of State. The scheme was intended to enable good landlords to be recognised by private renters and, where housing related issues may be prevalent, for a system by which a clear line of accountability could be identified so problems could be resolved – the ultimate objective being to bring about an improvement in housing conditions for private renters through improved property management.

To date the Council has issued 5145 landlord licences as part of the pilot Selective Private Landlord Licensing Scheme. The number of licence applications that have been received and are yet to be issued is currently 1815. The Council is working to have all outstanding licences issued by the end of March 2024.

Hackney Council remains committed to the implementation of an extended Selective Licensing Scheme and is currently finalising the assessment and evidence base relating from the implementation of the existing pilot Selective Licensing Scheme. Once the assessment is complete a new application will

be developed and because it is intended to cover the whole borough it will be required to be submitted for consideration to the Secretary of State later in 2024. I hope this response has answered your question.

7.8 From Cllr Anna Lynch to Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Regulatory Services

In light of the ongoing catastrophe in Israel and Gaza and the trauma and distress this has caused many in the communities that we represent, can the Cabinet Member for Community Safety advise on what support the Council has provided for those communities living in our borough?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Regulatory Services

We have all been deeply affected by the tragic events in Israel and Gaza since 7 October. The suffering and loss of life is truly terrible. We know many Hackney residents are of Israeli or Palestinian heritage, or have connections to the region, and will be deeply anxious for loved ones and their wider communities.

In Hackney, we have felt the reverberations in a shocking rise in hate crime in our borough, across London and the UK. I know that anyone with links to the region, as well as our Muslim and Jewish residents in particular are concerned. It is more important than ever that we strengthen our ties as a diverse Hackney community of all faiths and none. We also know we need to engage with the full diversity of Hackney's faith communities.

Though the Council and our partners in the police and community safety groups have taken steps to stamp out hate and abuse, we know there is more to do.

In Hackney, we have a clear commitment to make Hackney No Place for Hate with our objective contained within our recently published Hackney Hate Crime Strategy 2023 to 2026.

In addition, our Muslim and Jewish communities have an established track record of working closely together to enhance community cohesion through close communication and working relationships.

Though there has been a rise in hate crime across London and in Hackney, it is a credit to our Muslim and Jewish communities that they have kept working together despite the difficult circumstances.

The Council's Community Safety Team is in regular contact with our Mosques in Hackney and has provided them with a named community safety contact to ensure we can quickly consider their concerns.

We have also been providing more frequent Enforcement Officer patrols in

and around Hackney Mosques and Synagogues in a low key way.

The Muslim Communities' representatives did not want increased high visibility patrols, but wanted a named contact together with a method of reporting Hate Crimes and Incidents via a third party.

We have been responding expeditiously to reports of offensive graffiti and fly posting through our online waste services process [Hackney.Gov.UK/reportaproblem](https://hackney.gov.uk/reportaproblem). Our waste team has been exemplary in removing the offending graffiti or fly posting within 24hrs.

In addition, we meet weekly with a number of our community leaders from our Jewish Communities. During these meetings representatives expressed a need for high visibility uniform patrols in and around Schools and Synagogues and consequently our Enforcement Officers have provided 175 patrol hours in the community since the beginning of the conflict.

To further support community cohesion the Community Safety Team has been included in a Jewish Community Leaders WhatsApp group and through this communication have been able to provide accurate information to dispel rumours whilst providing support to reassure communities.

Our partnership response is coordinated weekly via our Community Safety Partnership Tasking meeting which is attended by the Police and a number of internal stakeholders.

There is also a weekly Police led briefing for the community which details the ongoing Police response to the conflict which Officers from Community Safety and I attend.

The Council has also influenced the Borough Command Unit in setting up a dedicated Team dealing with Hate Crime reports as a result of the conflict and Officers in the Team will be updating a weekly community meeting on the number of Hate Crime reports received in the previous week including if anyone has been charged following any investigations undertaken from reports received and on cases which will result in prosecution.

I know from recent discussions with faith partners that not all hate crimes are reported. I urge anyone who witnesses or is the victim of a hate crime to report it to the police, to our community enforcement teams, or by a third party such as "True Vision" or Tell Mama. Only then can we tackle this problem and show that Hackney is no place for hate.

7.9 [From Cllr Narcross to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport](#)

Following the tragic death of a cyclist on Whiston Road, many residents are concerned that the road remains far too dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians. What action is the Council taking to reduce traffic speed and

vehicle number to ensure it remains a safe route for those who use it?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Thank you for your question regarding Whiston Road and the terrible collision that occurred which has resulted in the death of a cyclist. I really do appreciate your continued advocacy for this issue.

I share your concerns for the safety of cyclists and pedestrians on Whiston Road. We have not yet received the police incident report, which I am sure will be nothing short of forensic, given the loss of life. The report is likely to detail how/ why the collision happened and highlighted any other causation factors. The report may also make a series of recommendations which we, as the council, will earnestly review and consider.

Whilst I would not want to pre-suppose any actions the council may take once the contents of the report have been digested, we are aware that there is a frustratingly long standing issue with Whiston Road relating to both speed (85th percentile) and volume. Our original solution to this needed a partnership approach but unfortunately, this was not forthcoming from the other involved party.

We are currently going through the process of commissioning traffic surveys on both Whiston Road and the surrounding roads to give us a better understanding of the current traffic patterns. The next step is to determine a solution on what can be done to reduce speeds and enable our residents to feel safer whilst they use this road.

The Council is working on identifying funds to implement measures at Whiston Road. Whilst we await the full report from the Police and possible recommendations we have asked the MET's cycle safety to complete close pass enforcement and we will also encourage residents participation in aiding the Community Road watch which is relevant to speeding concerns.

I do understand the cause of concern. A loss of life on our roads is keenly felt by all those in Streetscene and the community. We will work tirelessly, both internally and with our external partners, to make our roads as safe as possible.

7.10 From Cllr Young to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

The New River Path is a much-loved place to stroll along and enjoy nature. What is the Council doing to improve access for all, explore options for safe cycle routes away from the peaceful pedestrian path and enhance biodiversity?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment

and Transport

I am writing to thank you for your question directed to me in advance of Full Council. Unfortunately we ran out of time to take the question that evening, which is why I am responding in writing.

Your concern for the New River Path is appreciated - thank you for your advocacy of this issue. In line with your question, the Council has developed a number of initiatives to increase accessibility, explore more safe cycle routes and enhance biodiversity.

Accessibility of New River Path

The New River Path has been shared for many years by pedestrians, runners, dog walkers and cyclists. In recent years the path has regularly become very muddy with numerous puddles proving difficult for those with buggies or wheelchairs to use.

As part of the West Reservoir Improvement Project, we have recently resurfaced the path to make it more accessible, and have plans to replace the existing stepped bridge with a level accessible bridge. Roundels have been painted on the path, along with the words 'pedestrian priority'. Further signage emphasising 'pedestrian priority' will be erected, consistent with signage in some other public spaces in the borough.

The Council is open to exploring suggestions for the provision of an alternative cycle route. However, some of the roads in the immediate vicinity are part of the Woodberry Down development and have not yet been adopted by the Council. As per this adoption process, the Council will enter into discussions with the developer and we will consider what work would be required to provide an additional route. **We would warmly welcome your input as this progresses.**

As part of the wider programme, we know how important it is to provide safe conditions for cycling. Hackney is one of the most cycle friendly boroughs in London with one of the highest rates of cycling and the Council has an ambitious plan to improve conditions for cycling in the borough, which were detailed in the Local Implementation Plan published in January 2023. The plans included increasing coverage of low traffic measures in the borough, as well as several cycling schemes, including Cycleway 23 that runs across the borough from Lea Bridge to Dalston, which is due for completion this year.

Closer to the area in question, in recent years the Council introduced a separated cycle lane along Green Lanes and is currently working with Transport for London to investigate options for improving parts of Seven Sisters Road for walking and cycling.

I hope this sets a firm foundation for managing cycle infrastructure that allows us to direct cyclists to safe routes and prioritise pedestrians on dedicated

pathways. We want the borough to become safer, friendlier and more inclusive for all.

Enhancing biodiversity

The Council is working on a number of initiatives to enhance biodiversity and this is a core component of our environmental strategy. With regards to this, we have recently adopted the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Local Nature Recovery Plan. We know that conserving wildlife in urban areas is both a challenge and a necessity, especially as there are multiple competing land-uses in urban areas.

This is only exacerbated by high population density and intense recreational demand on existing parks and green spaces. It's a Council priority because of the moral responsibility to provide space for wildlife amongst us, but also because we know that making space for nature has associated benefits for our residents.

The Local Nature Recovery Plan specifically mentions that we need to improve the riverine corridor created by the New River. As such, we have now sown approximately 800m² of wildflower seed along this route, which has very high floristic diversity including excellent pollinator species. The policy case for planting wildflowers is strong - it will vastly increase the diversity of native and water's edge-appropriate flora along this route.

As part of the wider West Reservoir Improvement Project, biodiversity around the reservoir will be enhanced, with bug hotels, new trees, hedges and an extensive new area of reedbeds being planted. The proposed new cafe will have a green roof and Sustainable Drainage areas will be incorporated into the design. This will vastly improve the biodiversity of this important site, and ensure that it can continue to be enjoyed by all.

I thank you again for your question and look forward to working with you closely on New River Path.

7.11 From Cllr Gordon to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Service

We know Councils have undergone significant cuts in Government funding Since 2010 - in Hackney we've had a real terms cut of 41%. Can the Cabinet Member reassure us that services for our most vulnerable residents will be protected in the coming financial year?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Service

You are correct to point out that the Council has incurred real terms cuts in external funding of 41% since 2010. This also means we have had to raise more from Council Tax than ever before placing more pressure on our

residents.

That is why in our manifesto we committed to support our most vulnerable residents by giving low-income households a bigger discount on their Council Tax bill, despite no support from the Government for this. The first stage of that commitment was to provide low-income households with a 90% discount on their Council Tax bill by 2026. We've recently consulted on delivering that commitment 2 years early in April 2024

I must also thank you for your role in chairing the Scrutiny Panel in its wide-ranging review of the council tax reduction scheme which provided a range of evidence which fed into our proposal and our consultation process.

We cannot, though, ignore the fact that the Council is facing unprecedented financial challenges, as the increased demand on our services and the recent high levels of inflation alongside funding cuts place pressures on our finances. For the period 2024/25 to 2026/27 we have an estimated funding gap of some £57m.

A primary driver of this is the additional funding we need to set aside to meet the increasing demand for vital social care services for children, young people and adults in a system which is increasingly underfunded. We are also facing unprecedented demand in our homelessness services as more and more of our residents are unable to keep pace with rising rents in the borough.

All of this means that we will have tough decisions to make in setting a balanced budget for next year. As ever, we will do this in a carefully planned and considered way. We continue to make sure our budget proposals are fully worked up with the impacts on our residents fully considered and that they are subject to our now well established budget scrutiny process.

I also must mention last week's Autumn Statement by the Chancellor which announced very little for Local Government. There was no response to the social care pressures with funding no more than had already been announced last year. There was some new money for homelessness prevention - but at £120m nationally this is wholly insufficient to meet the problems faced. While we welcome some support for businesses and increases in pensions and benefits including an uplift in the local housing allowance there was no mention of a continuation of the Household Support Fund - which at £5.6m locally as provided a vital lifeline for some of the most in need in our communities.

7.12 From Cllr Rathbone to the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

The Clapton Portico building was meant to have opened this autumn as the new home of the Lower Clapton GP surgery but has still not done so. Please could the Cabinet Member for Health update Members on the progress of

building work here?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

Thank you for your question in advance of Full Council about the reopening of the Portico as the Lower Clapton GP surgery, which I am now following up in writing.

Practical Completion on this project was due for the last day of November this year. It is important to clarify that “Practical Completion” is the completion of the programme of works and means that the building is ready to be handed over to the Council. The opening of the surgery will subsequently occur when the GP Practice has completed its own preparations.

As you are aware, the Portico is of a certain age, is Grade 2 listed and of a very particular design. As work has progressed, this old landmark has revealed some hidden challenges which the contractor must deal with sympathetically to ensure the quality of the building is kept intact. To date that has led to a delay in Practical Completion. Recent re-calculation of the programme to create the space to accommodate this careful work has led to a projected “Practical Completion” of no sooner than the end of January next year, and that would allow the Practice to commence its own preparation of the new facilities.

A glance into the site will give passers-by a sense that completion is close at hand, and the Council’s Project Management team is monitoring the final works closely to ensure that nothing is missed in the process, and before it is accepted and passed over to the incoming Practice.

I hope this has clarified the current position and would be happy to link you with Chris Pritchard in Strategic Property if you wish to discuss this further.

7.13 From Cllr Joseph to the Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing Needs and Homelessness

The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission has focussed on the stressful and isolating impacts of life in temporary accommodation. Can the Cabinet Member tell us what is being done to mitigate the potentially isolating effects of temporary accommodation, to monitor children’s welfare and to improve families quality of life?

Response from the Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing Needs and Homelessness

Thank you for our question directed to me in advance of Full Council on

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support for residents in temporary accommodation. As the meeting did not get to the question on the night I am following up in writing.

I recognise that living in TA can have significant negative impacts on a household's health and wellbeing. Living in temporary accommodation is disruptive and unsettling to residents and their families, and while we work with them to help find accommodation, we also look to provide additional support to mitigate the challenges they face.

Isolation can be a particular concern and we encourage all our residents to speak regularly with officers not just about their housing options but also other support they might need. We will signpost or actively engage with other services and organisations that we work with and could help. One example of this is Engage Hackney, and we have also been working closely with NHS partners on how we can improve access to NHS services through outreach and in practice work, and also by developing community hubs.

We look to offer additional support for households with children, where living in temporary accommodation presents unique challenges. For example, we work with CARIS Families, a grassroots charity that runs support services for homeless children and their parents living in hostels in the London Boroughs of Camden and Hackney. They run an after-school club at Royal Park Hostel, offering play and arts and crafts activities to resident children, and run a Homework Club offering one-to-one academic help and mentoring to school-age residents.

We also support the Hackney Playbus, which is a small charity dedicated to bringing play opportunities and support to families who need it the most. They visit our hostels to deliver play sessions that provide a variety of resources and activities that support children's early learning and development in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

City and Hackney's Enhanced Health Visiting team is a universal nurse-led service for all residents with children aged up to five. Specialist public health nurses visit families in their homes and community spaces and use strength-based approaches to support behaviour change, promote health and keep children safe. Their new service was launched in September 2023 called the 'Enhanced Health Visiting Service', which includes eleven senior nursing roles for areas of health that are considered to have the most impact on health and well-being outcomes and are reflective of the needs of families residing in Hackney. This includes a lead role for a senior nurse to support 'homeless or vulnerably housed' families.

Families on this caseload receive targeted levels of care tailored to their specific needs which could include more frequent visits by the health visitor to provide an opportunity to establish trust and develop an understanding of the family's needs. The nurse undertakes an initial holistic assessment and organises support for families to access other services, such as the support available within City and Hackney's early years settings and children's centres

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or mental health services. The health visitor will help address families' broader health and well-being concerns, such as reducing isolation or providing opportunities for young children to access safe spaces to explore their surroundings and develop their gross motor skills.

Children's Centres in Hackney also conduct extensive outreach across hostels, working with hostel managers to identify support needs. For example, The Sebright Children Centre recently reported successful work with a hotel in Hoxton earlier this year, where 24 families living in a hotel were provided targeted family support. Some examples of support include helping families to access food vouchers through the Alexander Rose Charity. This charitable scheme, partially funded by public health, provides eligible families with vouchers that can be spent in markets to buy fruit and vegetables. Other support included assisting children with speech and language needs to access services and stay-and-play facilities to support child development. This work is not unique and occurs across all the centres, working with health colleagues to provide holistic support for families. Midwives and health visitors refer families living in temporary accommodation to the Multi-Agency Team for early years services that provide a gateway to all available services to families in the borough.

Despite our best efforts to provide good quality temporary accommodation that meets the needs of residents, temporary accommodation is not a substitute for a settled home. The best way to improve family life is to help them into a home. We provide ongoing support and advice to residents so they are able to make informed decisions about longer term housing and can provide financial assistance in meeting rent in advance, deposit and moving costs to facilitate this.

I hope this has clarified the programmes available and our commitment to ensuring temporary accommodation residents are supported as much as possible.