

# Helping young homeless people in Hackney

## Context

Earlier in the year LSE London undertook a short [project](#) looking at how Hackney addresses their particular problems of homelessness among young people.

Hackney was chosen as a particular example because is a relatively young borough with a quarter of its population under 20 while the proportion of residents between 20-29 years has grown in recent years to just under 25%. It also has one of the largest homelessness problems in the country, twenty percent of which is concentrated among young people.

The borough has an atypical housing tenure structure with 40% of homes in the social rented sector. Those already living there have no reason to move, so turnover is particularly low and people on the waiting list may wait years or even decades before getting an offer of housing. Adding to this, is Hackney's recent rise from a relatively cheap place to live, to an increasingly popular location for workers in central London. This has driven up house prices and private rents to levels way beyond the means of most residents.

Given the large proportion of households living in social housing, one of the pressures facing the Borough is how the next generation can expect to be accommodated separately from their immediate families. Because this generation has been brought up in social rented housing, they tend to have expectations that they will also be allocated a council home – which is clearly unrealistic. It is not surprising therefore that there are particularly high levels of homelessness among young people forced to leave the (often overcrowded) family home. More generally some 20% of those who are accepted as homeless (around 800 each year) are aged between 18 and 25 and many of these young people are relatively poorly equipped to find work or to access training, let alone be able to afford their own accommodation.

Another major problem is that a significant proportion of young single people who come

forward as homeless have considerable support needs including, in particular, mental health problems – so Hackney’s responsibilities rarely stop at finding accommodation.

### **Hackney’s Approach**

Hackney clearly has a major incentive to try to limit the costs to the borough of homeless young people while still supporting them to obtain training and to enter the workforce so they can afford to rent accommodation or find lodgings in the private rented sector.

To try and stem the flow of young people coming forward as homeless, Hackney has introduced a mediation service which aims to bring the young person together with their family to find acceptable support and accommodation, perhaps in the extended family. Unhappily the initiative is often seen to be too little too late. However, the potential benefits of success are so large it would be worth revisiting this approach and looking more widely for appropriate families.

A rather different issue is how to provide young people with practical skills which they need to cope on their own, but which are no longer taught in schools or provided by immediate family. These include how to obtain and maintain a job – and how to manage the money they receive including paying the rent. Some of those interviewed noted that social media could have a stronger role to play in effectively maintaining contact and providing information to young people. Interviewees also suggested that it was immensely valuable to be able to contact a named individual when they needed information or support.

Hackney has effectively partnered with a number of charities which provide education and training to help young people gain experience in the labour market as well as access to accommodation which is affordable for a period while they find their feet.

The [research](#) looked in particular at the roles played by two of these charities: New Horizon and Fat Macys. Both are successful examples of charities providing education, training and support as well as in the New Horizon case some accommodation. There are many other examples of charities across London, but the numbers helped remain very limited. Ultimately the responsibility comes back to the local authority which must address the essential question: whether young people with limited skills can expect to obtain market accommodation in the borough and, if not, how they can be helped to find something acceptable elsewhere.

## **Conclusions**

The fundamental problem remains: there is no way that Hackney can provide adequate accommodation for around 800 additional young homeless households each year. Equally the local housing market provides very limited housing at prices that young people can afford. Some may find lodgings, but most must leave the borough if they are going to obtain secure accommodation. At the same time, many need additional support, which is unlikely to be readily available elsewhere. The problems are not new – just increasingly concerning.

**Here is a link to the Research Project Report: [LINK](#)**