

Report Title:	Housing Support for Families of Children with SEND - Site Visit and Focus Group Report Back
Meeting for:	Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission (with Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission)
Date:	10th February 2026
Produced by:	Overview & Scrutiny
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Introduction

1. To support the scrutiny of Housing Support for Families of Children with SEND (February 10th 2026), the Children & Young people Scrutiny Commission (together with Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission) conducted a number of engagement sessions with local families. These included
 - Site visit to three families on 23rd January 2026;
 - A focus group with five families on 26th January 2026.
2. The following provides a summary of the key issues identified by parents through these two engagement mechanisms to members of the Commission:

1. Unsuitable Living Conditions for children with SEND

- **Safety and Adaptation:** Properties often lack the necessary space for children with SEND to self-regulate. There are significant safety concerns, including exposed hazards (e.g., chewable materials, exposed wires), and concerns over open windows or balconies on upper floors posing numerous risks to children.
- **Structural Issues and Health:** Families consistently experience damp and mould, often due to structural issues, poor insulation and overcrowding, which can be dismissed by the council as condensation. This can lead to health issues, including asthma and at times hospitalisation for children.
- **Repairs and Maintenance:** Landlords (including the council) are not held accountable for necessary repairs, leading to long periods without essential amenities like hot water, and unsafe conditions such as faulty boilers with no temperature control.

2. Overcrowding and Lack of Space for families of children with SEND

- **Overcrowding:** Several families reported being severely overcrowded, with older children and those of different genders (e.g. 20-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son) sharing a single room.

- **Impact on Daily Life:** Overcrowding contributes to damp/mould and leads to practical difficulties, such as long queues for shared bathroom facilities, which increases the likelihood of accidents for children with SEND.
- **Space to Regulate:** The fundamental need for adequate space, especially a child's own room for self-regulation, is often unmet, despite being a recognised need.

3. Problems in the Housing Allocation and Assessment Process

- **Medical Needs and Banding:** Families have to "fight" to be placed in the correct priority banding for medical needs. The process for obtaining a statutory additional bedroom award on medical grounds can be difficult, with council decisions sometimes overriding medical advice.
- **Medical needs and evidence:** Lack of clarity about what medical information needs to be provided as evidence and from what sources is needed to support housing applications. Parents also noted that some external organisations refuse to provide supporting documents for these issues, which left families feeling stuck. Parents spoke of being overwhelmed by paperwork to support applications and processes.
- **Inadequate Offers:** Even when a higher bedroom need is established on medical grounds, the council has been known to offer unsuitable, smaller properties. One participant was offered a three-bedroom home after being awarded a four-bedroom need, with the council suspending bidding afterward.
- **Lengthy and Difficult Processes:** Applications for housing and for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are described as lengthy, difficult and not streamlined. There have been instances of applications being lost, system errors and significant delays in suitability reviews. One family noted that their application process started in 2011 and was still unresolved.
- **Lack of Joined-Up Services:** There is a perception that different parts of the council (e.g. housing, SEND services, occupational therapy) are not communicating effectively, leaving the burden on families to coordinate information and advocate for their needs. The role of the Occupational Therapist (OT) was stated as being limited to safety assessment, not housing allocation. Families and children are often required to go through multiple assessments by different council services (e.g. SEND, housing).
- **Lack of empathetic communication and approach:** Communication with families often lacked empathy with parents recounting that they felt interrogated by processes and sometimes shamed by questioning of parenting approach. Broad lack of understanding of the needs and challenges of families of children with SEND. There was unanimity among parents to require housing assessment officers to undergo further training in the needs of families of children with SEND.

- **Future Planning:** It was felt that the council has sometimes failed to consider the imminent future development and age of children when assessing room size entitlement, creating further insecurity.

4. Support to help families move into alternative, suitable accommodation

- Long waits for social housing (often many years) were recognised, but it was felt that council support with moving into suitable, secure alternative accommodation was limited - whether that is help with mutual exchanges, entry into the private rented sector or out of borough options.

5. The importance of integration of housing offer with children's education placements and healthcare provision (delivery of EHCP)

- **Housing insecurity and education needs:** Families reported that placement in accommodation outside of the borough often made it difficult to maintain education placements, noting how important a child with SEND education placement is and the continuity of that support (especially for specialist school placements).
- **Wraparound education care:** was greatly valued to parents of children with SEND where available (additional supported time away from home, allow parents to work etc.), but not consistently available across all schools.
- **Non delivery of EHCP/SEND support needs:** A number of parents highlighted that schools often do not deliver requirements set out in a child SEND assessment, which added to family needs of support from other services.
- **Continuity of health care support:** Similarly, housing placement for families of children with SEND and continued to access important local health services treatment and support (moving area to new waiting lists etc).
- **CAMHS:** Parents reported long waiting times for families to be assessed and supported, compounding local needs and housing pressures.

6. Independent advice, guidance and support

- **Complexity of family situations and navigating services:** Parents of children with SEND spoke of the difficulty of navigating local housing services, assessing entitlements and the need for additional support for their families SEND and housing needs.
- **Lack of specialist SEND Housing Support:** in the absence of dedicated housing support for families of children with SEND, it has been necessary for families to self-organise and develop their own support systems.
- **Access to specialist support services:** Hackney Law Centre and CAB were good if they can be accessed.
- **SENDIAGS:** Was praised by many parents who had used it, although parents felt that this service was overstretched to meet needs of parents of children with SEND.

- **Councillors as advocates:** Parents noted the positive and helpful role that local councillors can play in listening, supporting and advocating on behalf of families of children with SEND.