

Overview & Scrutiny

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission
London Borough of Hackney
Room 118, Hackney Town Hall
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To: Deputy Mayor Bramble (*Cabinet member for Children's Services and Young People*), Cllr Sade Etti (*Cabinet Member for Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeping and Temporary Accommodation*) and Cllr Anya Sizer (Deputy Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years & SEND)

Dear DM Bramble, Cllr Etti and Cllr Sizer

Housing Support for Families of Children with SEND

Thank you for attending the Commission's meeting on 10th February 2026 (held jointly with Living in Hackney) where members reviewed housing support for families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This was an informative and productive meeting and members of the Commission were appreciative of the contributions from parent representatives and officers from across the council to this discussion. A full public record is provided through the meeting [recording](#) and the draft [minutes](#).

At the outset, it is important for the Commission to acknowledge the multiple and often complex challenges that families of children with SEND evidently face in trying to secure appropriate local accommodation. Through the course of this scrutiny it has become clear that many such families are living in difficult circumstances, often for a long period of time, which severely impacts on the lives of their children and the wider family. The Commission is therefore particularly grateful to all those parents who opened up their homes to us and for sharing their housing experiences so candidly with members.

The Commission was reassured that a number of council teams, in addition to the housing needs service, were working to support families of children with SEND. Though as officers would acknowledge, these efforts are, however, constrained by the acute demand for and limited supply of affordable local housing, which severely limits the availability of housing options suitable to the needs of families. Whilst teams were working together, there was broad acknowledgement at the meeting that there were further opportunities to develop and improve the local support offer, and it is hoped that the suggestions provided by the Commission will guide and inform this process.

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Further data on the nature and scale of needs of families of children with SEND

1. It is evident to the Commissions that further investigation and analysis is needed to develop a more complete local understanding of the nature and scale of housing and related support needs of families of children with SEND. Without this data it is difficult to plan and coordinate local support for families. This needs assessment should inform Council plans to refresh its housing strategy and the development of local housing priorities. This needs assessment should also address the concern that many families with acute needs may not be on the local housing register, and that this may not present a full and accurate picture of the scale of local needs.

Co-producing a local approach with families

2. Following on from above, working collaboratively with local families of children with SEND is of course the most effective way to meet their housing needs. These families represent a significant resource for service improvement, and their knowledge, skills and personal experiences can clearly help to shape, develop and improve local provision. Co-production with parents not only can improve corporate understanding of families' housing needs and develop a more empathetic approach, but it can also help to identify and shape practical housing solutions or mitigations when options are limited.

In establishing a mechanism to support co-production with parents of children with SEND, housing needs and strategy teams may wish to consider the learning and expertise of the Area SEND Partnership whose strategy is grounded in this same approach.

Greater clarity on partnership working to support housing and related needs

3. Members acknowledge the problems that families of children with SEND face in navigating and accessing different services across the council to meet their housing and related support needs. Parent representatives highlighted a number of significant barriers to accessing services including the need to understand multiple quasi-legal systems (SEND, housing, benefits), repeat assessments and information provision, service fragmentation and at times, adhoc communication between services. This left parents to assume a 'project manager' role to ensure that council and partner services were linked up to better support their needs. It is also important to remember that not all families will have equal resources (time, energy or capabilities) to undertake such a role.

Whilst there are clear examples of good service collaboration to support families of children with SEND (e.g. Disabled Children Service) it is not clear how consistent this is across council services working with families of children with SEND or whether this is primarily operational. It was not evident to the Commission what input the SEND team have had in supporting housing colleagues in improving understanding of the needs of children and families with SEND and in developing a more

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empathetic approach in service communication, both of which were highlighted as issues by housing managers in initial scoping of this work.

In this context, the Commission would welcome further clarity as to how services from across the Council and the local partnership are working collaboratively, both operationally and *strategically* in supporting the needs of families of children with SEND. Further consideration as to how this works in supporting the housing needs of families of children with links to key council strategies and aligns to work with similar cohorts of children (i.e. children in temporary accommodation).

Review of the Medical Needs Assessment Process

4. A significant point of tension in securing housing support for families of children with SEND was the Medical Needs Assessment (MNA) process. Families described the complexity of this process, with parents not certain as to who or how medical evidence to support their housing application should be provided. Families also felt that this process was adversarial, in which medical evidence provided was challenged or 'reinterpreted' and which often overlooked children with 'hidden needs'. To those families already struggling in their current housing conditions and having already undertaken similar assessments elsewhere (EHCPs) the MNA process felt traumatising.

The Commission welcomed the acknowledgement of senior housing officers that the MNA process should not be adversarial, and the genuine offer to meet with parents of families of children with SEND to better understand how this process can be improved locally. The Commission would also welcome a broader review of the MNA process in particular:

- How to improve transparency around decision making;
- Streamlining of local assessment processes;
- Clarity and consistency in the supply of evidence to support children and families needs;
- How the MNA in Hackney benchmarks against other similar processes in other London local authorities.

More defined package of support for families considering moving to PRS

5. The Commission acknowledges that due to the limited local supply of social housing, the swiftest resolution for families of children with SEND would be to consider private rented sector (PRS) options. Parent submissions made it clear however, that there was a significant reluctance in this pathway due to tenancy insecurity and quality of accommodation in this sector. Similarly, parents were also reluctant to relinquish the special education placements and wider support for their children (children's social care, CAMHS etc) that may result from a move out of the borough.

Whilst the Commission welcomes the expected improvements that the Renters Rights Act (effective May 1st 2026) will bring to tenancies in the private sector, it is

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clear that further work is needed to 'de-risk' this option for this to be considered by more local families. In this context, the Commission would welcome the development of a clearer and more transparent package of financial and practical support which is available to local families considering moving to the PRS post May 1st 2026.

Accessible and Adapted Housing Supply

6. The Commission fully recognises the challenging context of local housing supply in which there is a severe shortage of social housing to meet the needs of local residents. The Commission also recognises that structural and financial constraints means that local authorities cannot simply 'build their way out' of this housing challenge. With 26% of applicants to the Housing Register having a disability as a factor in their housing need, yet only 10% of the social rented properties available being defined as accessible, this would suggest an inherent tension in the local housing register and the ability of housing services to meet the housing needs of children and adults with disabilities.

This is a complex and challenging issue beyond the scope of this brief review, but the Commission would welcome reassurance as to how the local authority's strategic intentions to increase the supply of accessible and adapted housing to meet the local families. In particular the Commission would welcome clarification as to how the emerging Housing Strategy will aim to deliver an uplift in the supply of accessible, adapted, and adaptable social housing for families with complex SEND needs

Once again, the Commission would like to thank officers and parent representatives for their support in this joint scrutiny exercise and looks forward to a response to the suggestions outlined above. It is hoped that this collective response will help find ways in which improved housing support can be provided to families of children with SEND.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Sophie Conway
Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Margaret Gordon
Vice Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

CC: - Rickardo Hyatt, Group Director Climate, Homes & Economy
- Jacquie Burke, Group Director Children & Education & Adult Social Care