1. **Summary**

1.1 This report submits the responses and action plan to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group on the Hostels Strategy

2. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Approve the Action Plan attached at Appendix 1 in response to the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group on the Hostels Strategy.

2.2 Consider the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group on the Hostels Strategy attached at Appendix 2.

---

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 SECTION 100D (AS AMENDED)**

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

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<td>Afazul Hoque</td>
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3 Background

3.1 The Working Group was established in December 2006 to review the draft Tower Hamlets Hostels and Move-On Strategy. The intention of the investigation was to review the hostels strategy focusing on how it will improve access to hostels for local residents who are in housing need and might benefit from them.

3.2 The Scrutiny Working Group first made a number of visits to hostels which included discussion with service providers and service users. The group then met with the Council’s Supporting People Team and the Homeless and Housing Advice Service. A round table discussion was held with service providers and referral agencies to gain their perspective on some of the issues raised by service users and also the issues facing them in referring and working with homeless people.

3.3 The Review report with recommendations was agreed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2007 and is attached in Appendix 2.

3.4 A detailed action plan setting out the response of the relevant Chief Officer to the recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.

3.5 The Hostels and Move-On Strategy is anticipated to be presented to Cabinet in December 2007 after consultation with all the key stakeholders.

4 Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

4.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

5 Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

5.1 Any financial implications arising from the recommendations will be met from within existing resources.

6 Equal Opportunity Implications

6.1 The report makes a number of recommendations to improve access for local people and in particular BME communities.

7 Anti-Poverty Implications

7.1 The report considers important issues in reducing homelessness and increasing access for local residents.

8 Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

8.1 There are no direct actions for a greener environment arising from the report.

9 Risk Management Implications

9.1 There are no significant risk management implications arising from the Working Group’s report or recommendations.

Appendices

1 Action plan and response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group on Hostels Strategy

2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group report: Hostels Strategy
## Response to Scrutiny Working Group Report on the Hostels Strategy

### Appendix 1

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<td><strong>R1</strong></td>
<td>That the Supporting People Team work with all the hostels to explore the potential for further infrastructure improvement. Specifically the Council should work with Look Ahead Housing Association to develop proposals for improving the Aldgate hostel with the minimum possible loss of bed spaces and consequent funding.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Dialogue and meeting to take place with Look Ahead linked to the Housing Corporation bidding round 08 – 2011. 2. Publicise aim to continue to improve infrastructure to hostels sector more widely. 3. Discuss options and prioritise bids (if not possible to submit all of them to the Housing Corporation), through SPCB.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick), with Look Ahead Housing (Mark Philippo)</td>
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<td><strong>R2</strong></td>
<td>That the Providence Road Housing Association (PRHA) Hackney Road service should be opened up to achieve direct local access by LBTH based agencies. In partnership with PRHA the Council’s Cabinet should make representations to DCLG to this effect.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Meet with PRHA and LBTH Homelessness, to confirm how to present and approach the CLG. 2. Draft letter and agree with the parties above outlining request. 3. Submit letter to November Cabinet Draft letter attached.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick), with LBTH Homelessness and Housing Advice (David Baker, Homeless Strategy Manager).</td>
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<td><strong>R3</strong></td>
<td>That research should be undertaken to understand the perception and cultural issues affecting BME residents around accessing hostels leading to an Action Plan being developed to improve BME access.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Revisit the information in Hostel and Move on strategy and update data to gain accurate picture of current position. 2. Consult with key partners, particularly BME groups and draw on work completed for Homelessness Strategy review of levels of homelessness in the</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick).</td>
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<td>Recommendation</td>
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<td><strong>R4</strong> That the HOST team works in partnership with local agencies to deliver a more joined up services, centred on delivering a personalised service tailored to individual clients.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Hold a stakeholder event to consult widely on the HOST model 2. Continue to proactively ask for feedback from all partners as HOST is implemented. Carry out a formal review 3 months after HOST up and running.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick), together with LBTH Homelessness and Housing Advice (David Baker, Homeless Strategy Manager).</td>
<td>1. July (completed) 2. February 2008 (based on Nov 07 HOST start up).</td>
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<td><strong>R5</strong> That the Council should publicly backs the Foyer Federation’s campaign to persuade the Department of Work &amp; Pensions to waive the 16-hour rule for residents of foyers.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Draw up a letter to the DWP, for amendment and approval at November Cabinet, backing the campaign – draft attached for comment.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick).</td>
<td>1. September.</td>
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<td><strong>R6</strong> That the Council should support Citizens Advice and Shelter’s campaign to scrap the Single Room Rent Restriction and Shared Room rate of LHA.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Draw up a letter to the DWP, for amendment and approval at November Cabinet, backing the campaign - draft attached for comment.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick), together with LBTH Homelessness</td>
<td>1. September 2. October 3. November 4. January and April 08 5. January 08.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R7</strong> That the Supporting People Team develops in partnership with service providers a strategic response to work with clients to reduce evictions and abandonments. That the borough 3. Draw up an action plan, with targets for different BME groups, for the Hostels sector in LBTH, drawing on good practice elsewhere.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Collate and analyse the current data for all hostel services linked to evictions and abandonments. 2. Benchmark with other areas in and outside of London. 3. Set targets with individual services 4. Review progress against targets and address any poor performance.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick), together with LBTH Homelessness</td>
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<td>response ensures that referral and assessment work is undertaken, support needs are accurately identified and assessed, there is some choice for clients in terms of hostels allocated and that hostel staff have detailed plans to support clients.</td>
<td>and Housing Advice (David Baker, Homeless Strategy Manager).</td>
<td>6. September 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>That the Supporting People Team work with hostel providers to explore the potential for further expansion of second stage accommodation.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick)</td>
<td>As Recommendation 1 above.</td>
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<td>R9</td>
<td>That the Supporting People Team work with service providers to ensure clients are not forced to move into private rented sector and are adequately prepared to live in private rented accommodation, including providing help with Rent Deposits, Housing Benefit / Local Housing Allowance, and if necessary, Discretionary Housing Payments to cover benefit shortfalls.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick), together with LBTH Homelessness and Housing Advice (David Baker, Homeless Strategy Manager).</td>
<td>1. August (completed). 2. January 08.</td>
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<td>R10</td>
<td>That the Supporting People Team explore the potential for specific floating support service be made available to clients</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick).</td>
<td>1. July (Completed) 2. July (Completed)</td>
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<td>performance 5. Though contract monitoring and visits to individual services ensure that referral, assessment and support plans and processes are all in place in a hostels quality report, pulling together a summary of all the feedback from service users and service visits. 6. Include choice in the design and operation of HOST so that people have some influence of the supported housing they are offered.</td>
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<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Include this specific objective in the work with providers in Recommendation 1 above, including taking forward the redevelopment of Daniel Gilbert House (PRHA).</td>
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<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Set up a dedicated short term project though appointing a project worker, to work through the detailed procedures and safe guards that need to be in place for successful moves into the PRS. 2. Draw detailed policies, based on feedback from service users, providers and other rent deposit schemes. Focus on detailing scenarios of how the move would work and all the ongoing short and long term financial implications, including links with HB.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Key stages and milestones</td>
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<td>moved from hostels to private tenancies.</td>
<td>2. Establish formal links between hostel providers and rent deposit services.</td>
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<td>3 August (Completed).</td>
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<td>3. Feed this recommendation into the strategic review of Floating Support services (due for completion in November).</td>
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<td>R11 That the Living Well CPAG reviews the decision to withdraw the HHELP service from hostels and specifically examines the effectiveness of its proposed replacement service in reaching hostel residents. Furthermore the Living Well CPAG considers how the Supporting People Programme can be incorporated into the wider partnership so that they are consulted and involved about important changes to service delivery and development.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Collate feedback from Hostel providers on the previous HHELP service and detail any key issues to feed into current service development. 2. Discuss issues with the ELMHCT. 3. Based on the above, produce a final report for Living Well CPAG that maps out a way forward and explores any proposals to develop services in partnership.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick).</td>
<td>1. October 2. November 3. January.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R12 That the Council should examine the possibility of increasing its support for the Drug Action Team to ensure it has the capacity to provide satellite services in local hostels.</td>
<td>Key stages and milestones: 1. Together with the DAT, review the range of DAT funded services that currently work with local hostels. 2. Together with the DAT and local hostels, identify any local good practice and any gaps in the current range of services, including any different ways of working in either Hostels or DAT services to meet any gaps or operational issues. 3. Draw the feedback and analysis from the steps above, into a final report, with a set of key proposals for consideration by the DAT and SPCB.</td>
<td>SPTM (Paul Wishart/ Carrie Kilpatrick).</td>
<td>1. October 2. November 3. January 08 4. September 07</td>
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<td>Recommendation</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Discuss the effectiveness of a small drugs and hostel half day conference, endorsed and chaired jointly by the DAT and SP (will arrange practicalities), involving hostels and key stakeholders to help work through the above.</td>
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Abbreviations:

- **SP** = Supporting People
- **SPTM** = Supporting People Team Manager
- **CLG** = Communities and Local Government (pay SP Grant to local authorities and determine the regulations under which SP operates, as well as monitoring the programme).
- **SPCB** = Supporting People Commissioning Body (SPCB), the partnership group which oversees and has formal responsibility for the SP programme in LBTH. It is chaired by John Goldup.
- **PRHA** = Providence Row Housing Association.
- **PRS** = Private Rented Sector
- **ELMHCT** = East London Mental Health Care Trust
Hostel Scrutiny Review – Action Plan - August 2007

Draft letters – for comment.

RECOMMENDATION R2
That the Providence Road Housing Association (PRHA) Hackney Road service should be opened up to achieve direct local access by LBTH based agencies. In partnership with PRHA the Council’s Cabinet should make representations to CLG to this effect.

To Richard Cunningham, Advisor on Homelessness and Rough Sleepers, CLG.

Re: Access to Hackney Road hostel for agencies based in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

As you may be aware, the Hackney Road hostel managed by Providence Row Housing Association (PRHA) is a mixed first and second stage scheme with 10 hostel places and 25 self-contained flats. Support is targeted at single homeless people with a history of rough sleeping who have high support needs around drug and alcohol use.

Currently, referrals are limited to verified Rough Sleepers, but we would like to explore with you the possibility of opening up referral rights to a wider range of agencies, especially those based within Tower Hamlets, and including the Probation Housing Advice Service and Tower Hamlets DIP. Extending access to agencies based within Tower Hamlets is supported by both PRHA and Thames Reach Bondway’s Outreach team in the initial discussions we have had with them relating to this issue.

This may have been raised with the CLG before, about two years ago, but as you know, Tower Hamlets has now developed a Hostels and Move-on Strategy. As well as looking to continue to monitor and improve direct service delivery and standards, this looks at achieving better move-on (rehousing) by opening up a wider range of rehousing options (in particular developing private sector options) and establishing better pathways through the service provision.

Within this context, the Hackney Road provision is significant as, dealing with high support needs associated with drug and alcohol use, it represents a service identified in the Strategy as under-represented within the overall Tower Hamlets provision. By opening access slightly to, say, 33% for LBTH agencies (DIP, Probation, Care Management in Substance Misuse Services etc.) this will, we feel, enable local people to receive a much needed service and contribute to the prevention of homelessness and broader Community Safety goals (including public health priorities).

As has been discussed with your department, LBTH has made tangible and real links directly between outreach agencies, through initiatives such as the Joint Working Protocol, building on work in the City, to ensure that not only Hackney Road, but our whole hostel sector contributes to the reduction and prevention of rough sleeping.

We are confident that our strategic approach will actually free up hostel places overall, opening up wider referral pathways to move-on accommodation and helping to resolve problems for individual providers and user groups.

As noted above, the widening of access is supported by PRHA, who also comment that it will help them continue to develop their relationships with local substance misuse services, as
currently these agencies provide support to the service and individual service users, but cannot, somewhat surprisingly, make referrals to the service.

I would be interested to know your reactions to this proposal, and whether there is any room for negotiation on the current position and to see if we can take our proposal further in full dialogue with PRHA and Thames Reach Bondway.

Yours sincerely

cc. Maff Potts, Hostels lead, CLG
Fiona Humphries, Chief Executive, PRHA and Sean Hickey, Manager
Hackney Road, PRHA
Petra Salva, Outreach Services Manager, Thames Reach Bondway.

RECOMMENDATION R5:
That the Council should publicly back the Foyer federation’s campaign to persuade the DWP to waive the 16-hour rule for residents of foyers.
Explanation: The 16-hour rule prevents entitlement to Housing Benefit for anyone over 19 if they are undertaking a training or education course of more than 16 guided or supervised hours a week. This raises difficulties for homeless people trying to break out of the circle of benefits dependency. As the Foyer Federation Report indicates, though this clearly affects young people in Foyers, it is a potential problem for much wider groups, including for example, successful asylum seekers.

Update since the scrutiny review completed:
Though the Foyer Federation has published a report and succeeded in getting questions asked in Parliament in 2006, the Foyer Federation has not indicated if more recent initiatives have taken place linked to this campaign. This draft letter to the Head of Policy at the Foyer Federation expresses the Council’s support for the campaign and asks for up to date information on how best to take this forward.

Dear Ms Livingstone (Head of Policy & Communications, Foyer Federation)

Re: Support of London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) for the campaign to abolish HB-related 16 hour rule

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets Supporting People programme includes a contract with the 41-unit Drapers’ City Foyer. Our recently developed Hostels and Move-On Strategy has identified (amongst other challenges) both the need for more independent move-on accommodation and the short-to-medium term inability of the social housing sector alone to meet this need.

Consequently, we need to open up more rehousing opportunities, including making better use of the private rented sector. We have identified a number of obstacles within the benefits system which both make it more difficult for people to obtain and sustain rented accommodation, and which act as a deterrent to landlords preventing them from accepting excluded or disadvantaged groups as tenants. Amongst these obstacles is the training/education 16-hour rule on HB, which you have produced a report on and succeeded in getting questions asked in Parliament.
The LBTH has recently carried out a Scrutiny Review into the Hostels sector and has expressed direct support for your campaign around this issue and I am therefore writing to you to find out what the up-to-date position is. Also, are you are still lobbying on this issue and how LBTH support the campaign in the future. Are there any bodies to whom we could usefully be expressing our concerns and endorsing your report?

Yours sincerely

Cc Drapers City Foyer

RECOMMENDATION R6
That the Council should support the campaign of Citizens’ Advice and Shelter to scrap the Single Room Rent Restriction and Shared Room Rate of LHA.

(Background and update:
The Single Room Rent Restriction puts a ceiling on HB entitlement for Under 25s at the rate considered locally appropriate for a single bedroom in shared accommodation, which is lower than the amount of HB payable to over 25s. This makes finding private accommodation in particular difficult for young people, and drives them to the most unsatisfactory and least secure end of the market, and also deters landlords from considering tenancies for young people. Under the Welfare Reform Act, which recently received Royal assent, and which will bring in the new Local Housing Allowances (replacing HB, and being paid direct to claimants at a fixed rate independent of actual housing costs) to be introduced in April 2008, this has been replaced by the Shared Room Rate for under-25s, which still effectively excludes them from self-contained accommodation. Shelter therefore regard this as disappointing and are not currently prioritising this campaign. However, they advise that with a new administration and increased priority for housing issues, it would still be helpful if LBTH expressed its concerns to the new DWP Secretary of State, Peter Hain).

To: Rt Hon Peter Hain, Secretary of State, Department of Work and Pensions

Re: The Single Room Rent Restriction (Housing Benefit) and Shared Room Rate (Local Housing Allowance) affecting under-25s.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has developed a Hostels and Move-On Strategy which has clear links with its Homelessness and Supporting People strategies. The Supporting People programme includes nearly 1000 hostel places.

The Hostels and Move-On Strategy is aimed at improving service standards within the hostels, and achieving a better throughput (pathways) to independent living. A key problem identified is the need to establish access to more suitable self-contained accommodation which can be occupied either independently or with low-level visiting (floating) support. Since it is unlikely in the foreseeable future that the social housing sector alone can meet this need, this will entail making better use of private rented resources.

As such, we have identified a number of obstacles within the benefits system which both make it more difficult for individuals to gain access to and sustain private rented accommodation, and which act as a deterrent to landlords who will seek to avoid lettings to disadvantaged or excluded groups. One of these is the Single Room Rent restriction on Housing Benefit, which sets a ceiling on entitlements for under-25s at the level locally appropriate to no more than a bedroom within shared accommodation.
The effects of this restriction are that otherwise independent under 25s, find it more difficult to obtain private rented accommodation, and where they can, tend to be driven to the most unsatisfactory or insecure forms of this accommodation. Furthermore, because of the difficulties in moving on, they often stay longer than is necessary in what ought to be temporary hostel places, blocking access for new cases.

Though the new Local Housing Allowances, due for general implementation in 2008, redefines the Single Room Rent Restriction as the Shared Room Rate, the overall effect is still effectively to exclude under-25s from self-contained accommodation or as previously noted, drive them to the most unsatisfactory and least secure end of the market.

We welcome the high priority recently given to housing in general, to the social housing sector in particular and we look forward to contributing to these new initiatives. It is essential that the welfare benefits system in general and Housing Benefit in particular, should work to support these developments. The original introduction of the Single Room Restriction, was vigorously opposed by a whole range of organisations in the housing and homelessness sector, when it was introduced in 1996, and we would like to formally request that it is kept as a high priority area for review so that the young vulnerable people in Tower Hamlets within our hostels sector are not further disadvantaged.

Yours sincerely

cc. Campaigns Team, Shelter;
    Campaigns Team, Citizens' Advice.
Tower Hamlets Hostels and Move On Strategy

Report of the Tower Hamlets Hostels Strategy Scrutiny Working Group

Tower Hamlets Council
May 2007
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Acknowledgements

The Working Group would like to thank all the officers and partners that supported this review. The views and perspectives of everyone involved have helped to shape the final recommendations of this report. We want to thank especially the hostel users and service providers who participated and who so willingly shared their experiences with us. We hope this report goes some way to responding to the many important issues they raised.

Working Group Chair:
Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar (Labour)

Working Group Members:
Councillor Timothy Archer (Conservative)
Councillor Louise Alexander (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Shamim Chowdhury (Respect)
Councillor Marc Francis (Labour)
Councillor Alex Heslop (Labour)
Councillor Bill Turner (Labour)

London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Vernon Simpson – Assistant Director, Housing Management
Jackie Odunoye – Head of Housing Strategy and Development
Colin Cormack – Head of Housing and Homeless Advice
Barbara Disney – Service Head, Commissioning and Strategy
Carrie Kilpatrick – Supporting People Manager
Paul Wishart – Supporting People Manager (Interim)
David Baker – Strategy Manager, Homeless and Housing Advice
Zakia Anwar – Strategy Officer, Homeless and Housing Advice

Scrutiny and Equalities:
Afazul Hoque – Scrutiny Policy Officer
Alan Steward – Scrutiny Policy Manager
Michael Keating – Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities

External:

Aldgate Hostel
Mark Phillippo – Centre Manager

Dellow Centre
Mary Kneafsey – Assistant Director Providence Row Housing Association
John Beswick – Centre Manager

Drapers City Foyer
Louise Joseph – Manager, East Thames Housing Association
Maureen Mead – Deputy Manager, East Thames Housing Association

Hopetown Hostel
Terri Holdroyd – Hostel Manager
Pat Omoregie – Assistant Hostel Manager

Riverside House
Andrew Southcott – Deputy Manager

Booth House
Captain Howard Russell- Centre Manager
Chair’s foreword

No-one who lived through the 1980s and 1990s will forget the shocking images of homeless people in ‘cardboard city’ under London Bridge and huddled in doorways on The Strand. Thankfully, over the past ten years the Government’s Rough Sleeper’s Unit and rough sleeping strategy has drawn thousands of homeless people, including even some of the most hardened rough sleepers, in from the cold. This has resulted in a sustained three-quarters reduction in the number of people forced to sleep rough on the streets, including here in Tower Hamlets.

At the same time, recent legislative reforms have strengthened the safety net for statutory homeless households i.e. those found to be vulnerable and in priority need. The Borough achieved the Government’s target of ending the long-term use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless families with children ahead of schedule and is now making good progress towards halving the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010.

However, as in most other inner-London authorities, much less progress has been made towards improving outcomes for single homeless people i.e. those not deemed as being vulnerable and in priority need. Of course, this must be seen against the backdrop of intense pressures on social housing and the rapidly increasing unaffordability of privately rented accommodation. Nevertheless, this situation leads to hostels becoming ‘silted up’ with residents who are ready to move on, but have nowhere to go to.

In these circumstances, the experience of those single homeless people facing fairly prolonged periods in a hostel can and must be made less damaging. We are therefore pleased to note that the Council has taken the initiative to put together a Hostels and Move On Strategy, and will be looking to implement this in partnership with local stakeholders from 2007 onwards.

This report follows a three month long inquiry by the Scrutiny Review Group in which we visited a number of the hostels in the Borough, talked to staff and residents, and questioned officers from the Homeless Services and Supporting People Team. The visits and discussions were interesting and informative, and at times inspiring. We would like to thank all those staff and residents who have participated in this inquiry and helped inform our recommendations.

The conclusions and recommendations outlined in the report are intended to improve access and the quality of our hostels. We hope all the parties involved will take the opportunity to address the issues highlighted in this report.

Finally, I would like to thank all the Councillors who participated in this review and Paul Wishart (Supporting Peoples Team) and David Baker (Homeless and Housing Advice Service) for their continued support throughout the course of the review.

Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar
Scrutiny Lead, Living Well
Recommendations

The Working Group recommendations focus on six areas that require consideration and action by the Supporting Peoples Team and Homeless and Housing Advice Service in partnership with local service providers. They are intended to support the findings and recommendations outlined in the Hostels and Move-On Strategy and further improve access to and quality of hostels in Tower Hamlets.

Quality of Hostels

R1  That the Supporting People Team work with all the hostels to explore the potential for further infrastructure improvement. Specifically the Council should work with Look Ahead Housing Association to develop proposals for improving the Aldgate hostel with the minimum possible loss of bed spaces and consequent funding.

Referral Mechanisms

R2  That the Providence Road Housing Association (PRHA) Hackney Road service should be opened up to achieve direct local access by LBTH based agencies. In partnership with PRHA the Council’s Cabinet should make representations to DCLG to this effect.

R3  That research should be undertaken to understand the perception and cultural issues affecting BME residents around accessing hostels leading to an Action Plan being developed to improve BME access.

R4  That the HOST team works in partnership with local agencies to deliver a more joined up services, centred on delivering a personalised service tailored to individual clients.

Housing Benefit

R5  That the Council should publicly backs the Foyer Federation’s campaign to persuade the Department of Work & Pensions to waive the 16-hour rule for residents of foyers.

R6  That the Council should support Citizens Advice and Shelter’s campaign to scrap the Single Room Rent Restriction and Shared Room rate of LHA.

Evictions and Abandonments

R7  That the Supporting People Team develops in partnership with service providers a strategic response to work with clients to reduce evictions and abandonments. That the response ensures that referral and assessment work is undertaken, support needs are accurately identified and assessed, there is some choice for clients in terms of hostels allocated and that hostel staff have detailed plans to support clients.

Move-On – Private Rented Sector

R8  That the Supporting People Team work with hostel providers to explore the potential for further expansion of second stage accommodation.

R9  That the Supporting People Team work with service providers to ensure clients are not forced to move into private rented sector and are adequately prepared to live in private rented accommodation, including providing help with Rent Deposits, Housing Benefit /
Local Housing Allowance, and if necessary, Discretionary Housing Payments to cover benefit shortfalls.

R10 That the Supporting People Team explore the potential for specific floating support service be made available to clients moved from hostels to private tenancies.

Mental Health and Drugs / Alcohol Services

R11 That the Living Well CPAG reviews the decision to withdraw the HHELP service from hostels and specifically examines the effectiveness of its proposed replacement service in reaching hostel residents. Furthermore the Living Well CPAG considers how the Supporting People Programme can be incorporated into the wider partnership so that they are consulted and involved about important changes to service delivery and development.

R12 That the Council should examine the possibility of increasing its support for the Drug Action Team to ensure it has the capacity to provide satellite services in local hostels.
Introduction

Background

1. The Working Group was established in December 2006 to review the draft Tower Hamlets Hostels and Move-On Strategy. The intention of the investigation was to review the hostels strategy focusing on how it will improve access to hostels for local residents who are in housing need and might benefit from them. The Working Group set the following objectives for the review:

- To gain an understanding of the number of hostels and their geographical location;
- To gain an understanding of use of hostels in the borough, focusing on BME communities and young people;
- To seek users and service providers views on hostels in the borough;
- To identify ways access to hostels can be improved.

2. The Working Group agreed to investigate these issues, and hoped to make recommendations that would help improve local access to hostels, particularly for certain groups of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) residents and young people. The Group established was politically balanced, comprising seven Councillors chaired by Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar, Scrutiny Lead for Living Well.

3. A key issue noted by the Working Group is that the majority of hostel users are not from Tower Hamlets, and the local authority does not make significant use of them in comparison to voluntary sector referral agencies. The Hostels Strategy proposed that as a local authority we should be making better use of hostels for our local residents. Hostels should be a key local service, involved in a network of service provision. They should be a central part of a multi-agency approach to re-integrating people into economic and social inclusion. This would help to meet many of the aims of the Community Plan, helping make Tower Hamlets a better place for living well, living safely, education and achievement and excellent public services.

4. The Working Group first made a number of visits to hostels which included Hopetown Hostel, Dellow Centre, Aldgate Hostel, Drapers City Foyer, Booth House and Riverside House. These visits and discussion with service providers and service users were interesting, informative and at times inspiring. They provided the Panel with an insight into some of the issues facing service users and providers and proved to be an invaluable way to start the review.

5. In February 2007, the Working Group met with the Council’s Supporting People Team and the Homeless and Housing Advice Service. This provided a strategic overview of the hostel sector in Tower Hamlets and the key documents behind the Hostels and Move-On Strategy which included the Supporting People Strategy and Homelessness Strategy.

6. The Working Group next held a roundtable discussion with service providers and referral agencies to gain their perspective on some of the issues raised by service users and also the issues facing them in referring and working with homeless people. The meeting provided the Panel with a useful insight into some of the barriers facing services providers and referral agencies. Officers from Homeless and Housing Advice Services also held an informal discussion with members of the Hostels User Group to seek their views about access to hostels and areas for improvement.
7. In taking this review forward the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the Working Group’s report and recommendations. The Council’s Cabinet will then respond to the report and its recommendations. All of the organisations and individuals that participated in the review will be sent a copy of the report and Cabinet’s response.

Hostels and Move-On Strategy

8. The East End has a long history of providing a refuge for those who have become homeless and destitute. The charitable and voluntary sector has formed the bedrock of that support, with many homeless hostels being developed in the late 19th Century to provide a roof over someone’s head. Sometimes that was just for a night but often it was for much longer. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets itself has offered financial support and advisory support for most of these institutions, to help ensure they can continue to shelter vulnerable homeless people from life on the streets.

9. The Hostels and Move-On Strategy provides a framework for an area of service provision which previously has not had the structure in place to operate as an integrated sector. It seeks to bring hostel services within the borough’s Community Plan objectives, demonstrating their values across a whole range of social policy objectives. The strategy provides an in depth analysis of supported accommodation services for single homeless people in Tower Hamlets. The Strategy has been developed by a multi-agency development group and an action plan is already being delivered where possible, and will form a work programme for 2007-08 and beyond.

10. The vision for the hostels strategy is that hostels reduce homelessness and help more people into settled homes, meeting both local and cross authority needs. Further through a partnership approach address the multiple causes and effects of homelessness and social exclusion, supporting people into independent living within a package of positive employment, training, health and social outcomes. The Strategy has five key aims which are:

- Providing excellent public services;
- Improving access to hostels;
- Increasing move-on options;
- Developing capacity to support the most vulnerable;
- Making economic and social inclusion the key focus.

11. A key aim of the Strategy is to better manage access to hostels to focus resources on those who would benefit most, giving particular regard to the local community. It is proposed that the level of local access would be increased to over 50% of total referrals from local agencies. The Review Group has chosen this aspect of Strategy as the focus of this investigation.

12. A January 2006 ‘census’\(^1\) of all Tower Hamlets hostel users showed that 53% of referrals are from outside the borough with Westminster and Camden the two most significant referral locations. Only 33% of hostel residents had a last ‘settled address’ in Tower Hamlets and only 38% were actually homeless in Tower Hamlets immediately prior to entering the hostel. Therefore, the majority of people who use hostels in Tower Hamlets are not from the local area, and the local authority does not make significant use of the hostels within the boundaries. The ethnic background of hostel users is diverse with over 46 different ethnic backgrounds. The most significant point about diversity in comparison with Tower Hamlets’ local population is that Black African and Caribbean service users

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\(^1\) Hostels Census undertaken as part of the development of the Hostels and Move on Strategy during January 2006
(36%) are over-represented by a factor of 6, while Bangladeshi and other Asian service users (6%) are under-represented by a factor of about 6.

13. The vast majority of the hostels are located around Local Area Partnership (LAP) 1 and LAP 2. The table and map attached at Appendix 1 and 2, provides an overview of the capacity and geographical spread of the key services. The clustering of hostels around LAP 1 and LAP 2 is an area of concern highlighted. The Working Group recognises that this is more of a historical factor rather than planned. However, it suggests that in future development of hostels, specific efforts be made to ensure that other parts of the borough are considered. The clustering of hostels also raises the issue of community integration of the hostel sector within the wider community. Members noted that some work had been undertaken to develop this, but felt this needed to be more of a strategic aim to ensure that the diverse residents of this borough are able to live and integrate with each other.

14. The Working Group supports the key findings and recommendations of the Strategy, which has set out the direction of travel for this important sector. The Group hopes the implementation of the Action Plan would see significant improvement in the quality of hostels and ensure users receive excellent services. Furthermore, it is hoped that the cycle of homelessness can be broken and more preventative work can be undertaken to reduce the number of people becoming homeless.

Supporting People (SP) Programme

15. SP is a national programme aimed at promoting independence and quality of life for vulnerable people. By providing housing-related support services that enable people to live successfully in their accommodation, SP has brought about a comprehensive change in the way the needs of vulnerable people are met. Launched on 1 April 2003, the programme has introduced a radically different system of providing and commissioning services – led by local needs, focussed on the development of partnership working, and supported by a robust review and monitoring system.

16. Tower Hamlets Council is responsible for administering the SP Programme for the borough. The Council has developed a SP Strategy which is aimed at providing a clear direction for SP services over the five years. The vision of the Strategy is to ‘deliver accessible, high quality and needs led services that promote choice, independence and social inclusion and enable vulnerable individuals to live successfully within the community’. From this vision five key aims have been set to achieve the vision and include;

- To provide effective services which have a positive impact on the lives of our most vulnerable residents;
- To ensure services meet the need of diverse community and enable equality of access for all;
- To ensure a partnership approach that delivers local and national strategic priorities;
- To ensure the provision of high quality housing related support services which are value for money;
- To increase Service User involvement in service provision and service development.

17. At present the SP programme spends in total £7.0m per year on services for single homeless and rough sleepers. This is mostly hostels with some supported move-on accommodation. This is 48% of the total Supporting People budget and pays for around 1000 units of first and second stage hostels, of which 255 have an allocated specialism
and 133 units in a range of supported move on-accommodation for former homeless people. A comparison of costs with selected inner London boroughs shows that Tower Hamlets provides good value for money for the number of hostels it manages. This also suggests that Tower Hamlets is relatively under funded compared to Camden. This anomaly might in part be explained by homeless people in Camden having much more intensive support needs than those in Tower Hamlets, but this is unlikely to be the whole story. The Working Group would therefore be keen to see how funding is allocated and seek comment from the Council’s Cabinet as to the lobbying efforts that have been made to persuade the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to address this situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected inner London Boroughs</th>
<th>Number of hostel units</th>
<th>Approx. annual spend (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>1005</td>
<td>12m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammersmith and Fulham</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>4.5m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. The Group recognise that the cost of SP nationwide was significantly in excess of original estimates, and understand why the HM Treasury has cut back funding in the last two years. However, these cuts now risk forcing the closure of a number of crucial services for homeless people and therefore the Working Group strongly support the campaign by Homeless Link, Shelter and the National Housing Federation for inflation-linked increases in the SP budget in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

Findings

Improving Access to Hostels

19. A key aim of the Working Group is to improve local access to Hostels and in particular for BME residents and young people. The Group heard from the Supporting People Team about a number of initiatives they have adopted to improve access for local people, BME communities and young people.

20. The main ways that local access is being improved is through setting out priority referral routes for Tower Hamlets based organisations and formalising this arrangement into SP contracts. Local access is also monitored and any issues or concerning data are discussed through the SP contract monitoring process. A further initiative is through managing low occupancy or ‘voids’ closely to ensure maximum use from the available resources.

21. The SP Team also work closely with other boroughs who refer into SP services and discuss longer term issues to manage this appropriately. This includes ensuring move on stays the responsibility of the referring borough where possible, discussing development of local provision with boroughs who may be referring large numbers of people to particular services. The SP Team has also been working closely with central government to revisit the access to local provision which has been restricted in the past and this includes Hackney Road.

22. Increasing move on options remains a key issue when considering access. Demand for move on accommodation is estimated to be 4 times supply and so the focus needs to be on making best use of all available options, including move-on outside the borough. From
the Hostel census, it is estimated that 27% of residents in hostels have been there longer than 2 years.

23. In meeting the needs of BME communities, the SP Team have held detailed discussions with service users and specifically users from BME communities. Furthermore, diversity is a key element of SP systems and the Council has set a target in this area for all SP services to meet a 'B' level in diversity by March 2008. The B level requires specific targets to be set for hard to reach and BME groups and progress against these to be measured. Some services have taken this area forward actively, whilst others are receiving more support and guidance from the SP Team.

24. The main ways that access for young people is being improved is through continued focus and joint work by the SP team and the Homeless and Housing Advice Service to significantly reduce numbers of young people in Bed and Breakfast, linking directly with SP providers working with young people. Further, linking young people who approach the Housing Advice Team into options in the private rented sector such as the Rent Deposit Scheme. Monitoring of services and developing links with young people's organisations and referral agencies. This includes care leavers referrals for example into Drapers Foyer.

25. A key issue raised by young people at Drapers Foyer in discussion with Members was the waiting time and lack of space to accommodate the number of young people that are seeking a placement. Members noted and supported the idea that capacity for schemes such as the Foyer model needs to be increased to ensure we are able to help as many vulnerable young people as possible and prevent future homelessness and the associated issues that would arise. Members also noted the positive community environment that exists within Drapers City Foyer. The Working Group believes that, in part, this is a reflection of the size of the foyer, which is still small enough to ensure that most residents know each other. It was also noted that the larger foyers are not always able to replicate the supportive community environment of Drapers City and recommend that size is a factor that should be considered in any expansion of the foyers in Tower Hamlets.

Quality of Hostels

26. The Working Group's visits included tours of the newly-rebuilt Hopetown Hostel and Riverside House, both managed by the Salvation Army, and the recently-refurbished Booth House again managed by the Salvation Army and Dellow Centre, managed by Providence Row Housing Association. All four of these hostels were a world away from the stereotype dormitory hostel common as recently as the 1980s and 1990s. Some have been completely rebuilt with Approved Development Programme funding, while others have been substantially refurbished under the £90 million Hostels Capital Improvement Programme run the by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The Panel pays tribute to both the Housing Corporations and DCLG for their preparedness to invest significant resources in these schemes, and strongly support continued HCIP funding in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

27. The one hostel the Group visited which does not appear to have benefited from major refurbishment is the Aldgate Hostel on Dock Street, managed by Look Ahead Housing Association. This hostel has around 150 bedspaces, and as it takes referrals of street homeless people and is open to direct access, it provides a roof over the heads of many with chaotic lifestyles, including those with serious drug/alcohol problems. The rooms
and amenities are basic and do not compare well with those in other refurbished or newly-built hostels.

28. Modernisation of Aldgate hostel to bring it up to the standard of Booth House may well involve the loss of a number of bedspaces for homeless people. This would cause problems enough when the need for hostels bedsplaces remains so stubbornly high. From the discussion Members held with Look Ahead Housing Association it was noted that any reduction in bedspaces would also lead to reduction in funding and rental and compromise the hostel’s financial sustainability.

29. The Working Group therefore believes that some targeted work needs to be undertaken through the SP Programme to support hostels with smaller rooms and basic facilities to improve the quality their accommodation. In particular SP Team should undertake discussions with DCLG and the Housing Corporations to seek external funding to improve the quality of hostels in the borough.

30. This has also been recognised in the Hostels and Move On Strategy and consultation with service users about accommodation standards revealed that there were concerns about the size of the room, users wanted a staged approach to move-on and improved security at hostels. Accommodation standards therefore can be seen in the wider context in terms of providing a positive environment to help make changes and creating a sense of belonging and respect for the facilities. The Working Group has therefore recommended that further work be undertaken to improve accommodation standards.

Recommendation 1
That the Supporting People Team work with all the hostels to explore the potential for further infrastructure improvement. Specifically the Council should work with Look Ahead Housing Association to develop proposals for improving the Aldgate hostel with the minimum possible loss of bed spaces and consequent funding.

Referral Mechanisms

31. The following graph shows the referral routes into hostels as reported in the hostel census. This suggests that 47% of referrals were from agencies within Tower Hamlets. The vast majority of the 15% of direct access is at Queen Victoria Seamen’s Rest. The Working Group noted that local people are not maximising the use of hostels and work needs to be undertaken with local agencies to increase local referrals.

Referral routes into Tower Hamlets hostels – January 2006
Source: Hostels and Move On Strategy
32. A key recommendation in the Hostels and Move On Strategy is to increase access by local agencies to over 50%, and as part of this for Hackney Road service to be opened up to local access. The Working Group fully supports this recommendation and is keen to see it taken forward as a priority. The Working Group also noted that the current referral mechanism to Hackney Road does not give any adequate direct local access and is keen that representations be made to DCLG and other relevant bodies to this effect. The Working Group also supports the recommendation to allow referrals from the Local Authority Housing Options Team with an additional focus on referrals from the PRHA Probation Housing Advice services which currently has severe difficulty accessing local hostels. The Service could also be opened up for clients with complex needs. The Working Group noted that some discussion have taken place locally and has recommended that this be pursued further to obtain local access.

**Recommendation 2**
That the Providence Road Housing Association (PRHA) Hackney Road service should be opened up to achieve direct local access by LBTH based agencies. In partnership with PRHA the Council’s Cabinet make representations to DCLG to this effect.

33. The hostels population is extremely diverse with 48 different ethnic backgrounds identified in the hostels census. The most significant point about diversity in comparison with Tower Hamlets' local population is that Black African and Caribbean service users (36%) are over-represented by a factor of 6, while Bangladeshis and Asian service users (6%) are under-represented by a factor of 6. White British and Irish service users (42%) are represented at a very similar level to the borough as a whole. The graph below shows the ethnic profile of hostel users as at January 2006.

34. The Hostels and Move On Strategy noted that very small number of Bangladeshis use hostels perhaps because of strong family and community ties, making single homelessness a less likely outcome and also due to the fact that they are not a refugee community. Furthermore, both from discussion with service users and service providers the Working Group noted that some BME residents such as Bangladeshis have perceived stereotypes about hostels and their users and this formulates a negative perception about hostels within this community. The Hostels and Move On Strategy also recognises this and has recommended further research be undertaken. The Working Group welcomes this and asks that an Action Plan be also developed to address the issues facing this community. Part of this may be around better integration within the community and promoting better understanding of the role of the hostel sector within the wider community.
Recommendation 3
That research should be undertaken to understand the perception and cultural issues affecting BME residents around accessing hostels leading to an Action Plan being developed to improve BME access.

35. The Review Group was asked to look in details at proposals for a Housing Options and Support Team, based in the Homeless and Housing Advice Service. This model is based on best practice in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and is designed to ensure that single homeless people have full and appropriate assessment of their housing needs. This will provide a different assessment model to the present system for priority or non-priority homelessness. Instead it will focus on assessing support needs and making referrals to appropriate hostels or other supported housing scheme. It is anticipated that the team will make between 250 and 300 referrals per year, of whom about 125 would already have been assessed as in priority need. Agreements would have to be made with hostels on the numbers they would be likely to accept through this route.

36. The benefits of such a model are principally about increased partnership working between statutory services and the supported housing sector, providing better outcomes for single homeless people. It also provides the potential for much better use of services and resources by acting as a gateway for SP services. Thirdly, with the development of this approach it will be easier to monitor outcomes and show the benefits of hostels for Tower Hamlets. Other benefits include better assessment of needs, better homeless prevention and better strategy and commissioning.

37. To refer 300 people per year through this route would double the number coming through statutory agencies and would help take the level of Tower Hamlets referrals to over 50%. However there are some issues which needs to be developed to ensure effective joint working and this include an agreed assessment and referral process. This was an issue raised by a number of service providers during a meeting held with them. In particular they expressed concerns about the experience and quality of the assessment undertaken by the existing Housing Options Team and felt that the final referral/acceptance decision should rest with the service provider or a Panel.

38. While it is difficult for the Working Group to comment on the likely effectiveness of the HOST model, there is a clearly demonstrated need for a more joined up approach, centred on delivering a personalised service tailored to the individual. Also if HOST retains responsibility for each client, it will be much easier to keep track of their progress. However, the Working Group is keen to highlight that the Homeless and Housing Advice Team liaise closely with service providers to agree upon a referral mechanism and also staff recruitment and development for the HOST.

Recommendation 4
That the HOST team works in partnership with local agencies to deliver a more joined up services, centred on delivering a personalised service tailored to Individual clients.

Housing Benefit

39. The Working Group were concerned to note the problems facing young people in foyers, whose reliance on Housing Benefit to pay the high rent and service charges means they are restricted to a maximum of 16 hours training each week. This restriction is completely
at odds with the Government’s aim of tackling social exclusion by helping young people into employment, education and training. This issue was particularly highlighted to the Working Group by a number of young people during their visit to Drapers City Foyer.

40. The Working Group is keen to ensure that residents from the foyer are encouraged to develop themselves and be equipped to find a better life through education and training. The current welfare system does not help these vulnerable people and will in some cases increase homelessness through eviction. The Working Group therefore recommends that the Council backs the Foyer Federation campaign to waive the 16-hour rule for residents of foyers. Since the campaign was launched in November 2005, almost 100 Members of Parliament have backed the Foyer Federation’s call for Work and Pensions Ministers to deal with this problem. Despite this, minister remains opposed to change housing benefit regulations to help young people in foyers.

Recommendation 5
That the Council should publicly backs the Foyer Federation’s campaign to persuade the Department of Work & Pensions to waive the 16-hour rule for residents of foyers.

41. The Working Group were further concerned to note impact of the Single Room Rent (SRR) restriction on Housing Benefit has on the ability of vulnerable young people to sustain an Assured Shorthold Tenancy in the private rented sector. The SRR limits Housing Benefit payments to those under-25 years old to the average of a room in shared accommodation. As a result, many young people are left with benefit shortfalls that mean rent arrears rapidly accrue and they are left facing eviction and homelessness all over again. The Department of Work and Pension is introducing the flat-rate Local Housing Allowance to replace Housing Benefit in the private sector. The early indications are that the average benefit shortfalls are not much less than they are currently. Shortfalls under the new Shared Room Rate of LHA for under-25s remain particularly unsustainable. The Working Group therefore recommends that the Council supports the campaign run by Citizens Advice and Shelter to scrap Single Room Rent restriction and Shared Room Rate of LHA.

Recommendation 6
That the Council should support Citizens Advice and Shelter’s campaign to scrap the Single Room Rent Restriction and Shared Room rate of LHA.

Evictions and Abandonments

42. The 2005/06 performance indicators show there were 1016 new hostel users in 2005/06 with a similar number leaving over the same period. This is an overall turnover rate at 123%. The Hostel Census and exit survey show that a very significant number of service users leave hostels before they have been there for 6 months; 76% of these departures are for evictions or abandonments. This is an area of significant concern which the Hostels and Move On Strategy examines in detail. The Strategy includes recommendations around improving quality and undertaking sufficient risk assessments and support planning. The Working Group noted that has been some improvement in reducing evictions abandonments for those staying more than 6 months, in a number of services and the current average rate of unplanned moves, including abandonments and evictions is 39%. In particular the Working Group commended the excellent work undertaken by Aldgate Hostel to reduce this to 50% despite working with a very difficult client group.
43. The most common reason for evictions is arrears (45%) followed by threatening or abusive behaviour (22%) and for abandonments, the most common reason suggested is arrears (23%). The Working Group concluded that the current support service to new users was insufficient. The Group was keen to ensure that support at this stage is effective to reduce the cycle of homelessness and ensure people are being set in the right direction from the first time they come into the hostel sector. The Working Group recognises that there will be some evictions and abandonments due to the complex nature of many clients’ needs, but felt that 39% is a figure that can still be improved upon and where individual services show much higher rates of abandonment and evictions then this is very worrying. The Working Group therefore recommends that the SP Team develop a strategic response to reduce both evictions and abandonments, in particular working with those hostels where the departure is high to produce an Action Plan to address this issue.

Recommendation 7
That the Supporting People Team develops in partnership with service providers a strategic response to work with clients to reduce evictions and abandonments. That the response ensures that referral and assessment work is undertaken, support needs are accurately identified and assessed, there is some choice for clients in terms of hostels allocated and that hostel staff have detailed plans to support clients.

Move-on Private Rented Sector

44. The Working Group noted that the demand for move-on accommodation is about four times the supply. The Hostel census found that about 27% of hostel residents require immediate move-on accommodation and this is expected to rise over the coming years. In number this equates to about 450 service users requiring move-on over the next year with basic annual supply of move-on about 110 units. This is leading to a severe silting up of hostels which is also affecting access to hostels.

45. In terms of the type of move-on required, most require self-contained accommodation, either with no support (57%) or with floating support (24%). From the census the Working Group also noted that only 62% of service users gave Tower Hamlets as first choice for move on. Furthermore, where service users have come from outside the borough they are less likely to want move-in the borough. Although referrals come all over London, move-on is still primarily organised on a borough basis.

46. The fact that consultation showed that only 14% of hostel users would consider living in the private rented sector as a move-on option suggests a considerable amount of work needs to be done to make this option more attractive. Amongst those factors worrying service users is the affordability of the private sector and the possibility of getting ripped-off by landlords. The Working Group agrees with the key strategic aim of the Hostels and Move-on Strategy to reduce the dependency on social housing as the primary move-on option and change the culture around staying in hostel to obtain a flat rented from the Council or Housing Association.

47. The Working Group also supports a better balance of first stage and second stage and hostel accommodation. The excellent second stage units in Hopetown and Riverside offer residents experience of accommodation much closer to independent living. In particular the Group endorsed the move of Daniel Gilbert House from first stage to second stage. This was very strongly emphasised to the Working Group Members by hostel residents during their visits. Users also felt that they need to feel as if they are
making progress out of the hostel even if this means going through the stages with more independence as they move along.

48. The Working Group retains some concerns about increasing the use of private rented sector as a move-on option. Many hostel residents may in fact have become homeless after being evicted from private rented accommodation. However, the Group recognises that in light of the demand for social housing within the borough, this is an option which must be used to help hostel users move-on and increase access. The Group is keen to ensure that targets for individual hostels referring clients to Private Rented accommodation should be avoided and also increase support to users who have been referred to private rented accommodation. The Working Group has therefore recommended that the private rented sector should not be forced upon hostel residents. The Group also recommends that on-going support services be provided to users to ensure they are able to cope with the demands of life in the private rented sector and have assistance on hand when required.

Recommendation 8
That the Supporting People Team work with hostel providers to explore the potential for further expansion of second stage accommodation.

Recommendation 9
That the Supporting People Team work with service providers to ensure clients are not forced to move into private rented sector and are adequately prepared to live in private rented accommodation, including providing help with Rent Deposits, Housing Benefit / Local Housing Allowance, and if necessary, Discretionary Housing Payments to cover benefit shortfalls.

Recommendation 10
That the Supporting People Team explore the potential for specific floating support service be made available to clients moved from hostels to private tenancies.

Mental Health and Drugs/ Alcohol Services

49. The Working Group visit to the various hostels also highlighted the various support needs of service users and in particular reliance on those support needs. An area that was highlighted to the Panel was the withdrawal of the HHELP team offering specialist mental health support within hostels. This issue was also highlighted to Members at the meeting with service providers.

50. The lack of consultation with hostel service providers about the withdrawal of this important service was of grave concern to the Working Group. The needs of hostel users are very complex with a high number of users with mental health issues. The service provided at hostels was a convenient way to ensure this group accesses the necessary help. This also highlighted the lack of involvement of the hostel sector within the wider Tower Hamlets Partnership. The Working group has therefore, recommended that the Living Well Community Plan Action Group (CPAG) considers this and works with East London and City Mental Health Trust to provide a similar service which meets the needs of service users in consultation with hostel providers. The Working Group has also recommended that the Supporting People Programme be incorporated into the wider partnership to ensure they are consulted and involved about important changes to service delivery and development.
The Review Group noted that at least a third of hostel residents suffer from drug or alcohol dependency, any may have intense support needs as a result. We welcome the acknowledgement in the Hostels and Move-on Strategy that the existing hostel system is not adequately equipped to cope with the level and complexity of the needs which are now evidence, and that there is an under-supply of specialist services. The Group therefore strongly support the proposals to increase the provision of specialist drug/alcohol treatment services and help Look Ahead HA expand its Substance Misuse Unit at the Aldgate Hostel.

**Recommendation 11**
That the Living Well CPAG reviews the decision to withdraw the HHELP service from hostels and specifically examines the effectiveness of its proposed replacement service in reaching hostel residents. Furthermore the Living Well CPAG considers how the Supporting People Programme can be incorporated into the wider partnership so that they are consulted and involved about important changes to service delivery and development.

**Recommendation 12**
That the Council should examine the possibility of increasing its support for the Drug Action Team to ensure it has the capacity to provide satellite services in local hostels.

**Conclusion**

52. In conclusion the Working Group noted that Tower Hamlets has a long history of providing a refuge to homeless people. The hostel sector in the borough is one of biggest in London, with dedicated staff and volunteers ensuring that vulnerable homeless people have a roof over their head and access to some of the support and training they need to turn their lives around. However, the Council and local organisations are not utilising this facility fully with hostel users coming from around London. It was noted that although there are central government restrictions on imposing local targets, much better use could be made of the hostel sector to help local homeless people.

53. The development of the Hostels and Move-On Strategy has set out the future direction for the hostel sector. The Working Group fully supports the strategy and the recommendations contained within it. It is hoped that the implementation of this strategy will increase local access and also improve the quality of hostel in providing a more effective service to address the multiple causes and effects of homelessness and social exclusion.

54. The Supporting People Programme contributes a significant amount of its annual fund to the hostel sector. The hostel sector provides good value for money in comparison to some other London boroughs. The Working Group is therefore keen to see that the Council’s Cabinet lobby the Department of Communities and Local Government to increase funding for the Tower Hamlets Supporting People programme.

55. The Supporting People Team have already introduced a number of initiatives to improve local, BME and young people access to hostels. The Working Group hopes these initiatives and the recommendations outlined in this report help to address some of the issues for local people in accessing hostels.

56. The Working Group noted that work has begun in improving the quality of hostels. In particular the physical infrastructure of some hostels was an area that needed to be further developed. This was highlighted as an issue by a number of users to Members as an issue which has helped them to settle into the hostel and also look at their future
development. The Working Group was therefore keen that work be undertaken with specific hostels to improve their infrastructure.

57. The report contains a number of recommendations around referral routes. The Working Group is keen to ensure that local access be increased to ensure it better responds to the needs of the local community. The Working Group has made two recommendations to support campaigns to help young people living in hostels. These would help users improve themselves and reduce the cycle of repeat homelessness. The Group noted from Council Officers that representations could be made to central government to pilot reforms to the benefit system along these lines.

58. The Working Group was concerned about the high percentage of evictions and abandonments. Although it was noted that there has been some recent improvements this is an issue which needs to be further improved to reduce people coming back into the system. It was felt that the initial assessment and support to users is an important element in improving this.

59. There are three recommendations about use of private rented sector as a move-on option. The Working Group is keen that hostel users are adequately prepared and supported in moving into this sector. Finally, the Working Group considered the issue of support services to hostel users and the role of the Supporting People Programme in the wider Tower Hamlets Partnership.

60. The Working Group welcomes the recent work that has been undertaken to improve the hostel sector and fully supports the Hostels and Move-On Strategy as providing a coherent and ambitious plan of action to deliver real improvements to the lives of single homeless people in Tower Hamlets in the years ahead.
## Appendix 1

### Hostel and supported move-on accommodation in LBTH (Extract from Hostel Strategy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Total Units</th>
<th>Comprising</th>
<th>Including specialist provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First Stage</td>
<td>Second Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldgate</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Booth House</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Gilbert House</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dellow &amp; Bartlett</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drapers City</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Gibbons House</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelis House</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackney Road</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopetown</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Belvedere House</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QVSR</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1003</strong></td>
<td><strong>707</strong></td>
<td><strong>228</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76% 24% 0% 5% 4% 13% 5% 6% 0%
Appendix 2

Map of hostels in Tower Hamlets

- Edward Gibbons House
- Drapers City Foyer
- Queen Victoria Seamens Rest
- Hopetown Hostel
- Aldgate Hostel
- New Belvedere House
- Riverside House
- Hopetown Hostel
- Fidelis House
- Booth House and Victoria Court
- Dellow Centre / Bartlett House
- Daniel Gilbert House
- Hackney Road Rooms and Flats
To find out more about Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets:

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