



Early Engagement
on the
Housing Allocation Scheme in
Kensington and Chelsea

May 2021

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1. Statement by the Community Advisory Group:

The council has had a clear agenda to reduce and remove social housing in Kensington and Chelsea over the past five decades. A process of social cleansing has reduced the number of council housing units in the borough and so it is not surprising to us that the borough now has so many people in long term temporary housing outside the borough. If it were not for the Grenfell Tragedy, this work would not have been commissioned and we would not be given this opportunity to comment. We do not want our comments and our views to be used by the Council as a consultative fig leaf. We want to see some evidence of cultural change in the Council before we will believe in the new policies of co design. We want action and substance not just talk.

Kensington and Chelsea is our home. It is a place we love and we want our Council to serve us, the local residents in a respectful, thoughtful and compassionate way. We want our Council to become known for the care and attention it pays to each and every one of its residents. We want it to become known for treating all residents equally with no undue influence by some residents because of their status or wealth.

Over recent years the housing services have become renowned for the lack of attention they paid their residents. The boroughs housing is foreshadowed by the tragedy of Grenfell. The words of a witness to the Grenfell Inquiry “they didn't treat us with respect, humanity, or empathy. If they had done, we wouldn't be sitting here now,” sadly ring true.

We want this to change and for the Royal Borough to become a leader in cultural transformations from the previous practice of ignore or blame the tenant to an empathetic borough with a reputation for compassion. The council needs to listen and pay attention to all its residents for that compassion to take root and grow and we hope that this report assists the council in this.

The United Nations identifies adequate housing as a fundamental human right, defining it as “the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.” It further clarifies these rights to include security of tenure, adequate conditions, protection against forced evictions and access to affordable housing.

UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The United nations international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights identifies a basic human right to “live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.” While countries from Argentina to Niger, and many European countries including Belgium, France, Finland, Italy, Portugal and Spain have ratified this agreement, sadly the UK has not. We think it should.

Our role as a group of community leaders, activists, participants and support organisations has been to think and reflect upon the evidence that NewmanFrancis has gathered about Kensington and Chelsea’s Housing Allocation Scheme including survey responses and data sets. We have reviewed how it works or doesn’t work for the people upon whom it has the greatest impact. We have scrutinised this information and that in data sources to identify problems and some improvements that we can lobby the Council to implement.

There are three thousand people on the Kensington and Chelsea Housing Register. Within this report we hear the voices of over 250 people. This report therefore holds a lot of evidence from interviews, conversations, surveys and meetings, about people’s experiences of the delivery of the Housing Allocation Scheme and the impact that it has had upon their lives. The case studies provide difficult reading and may make you sad or may make you angry. We think the situations that Aria (page 56 and

75), Anie (page 56 and 77) and Iyah (page 56 and 81) have found themselves in should just not be happening in one of the wealthiest parts of the UK in the 21st century. The Council and the government whose policies the Council administer should be ashamed of what these people have and are going through.

Main Issues

The key findings raise many issues that need to be addressed going forward but below are the main issues that we, the Community Advisory Group, want to highlight.

The scarcity of help, support or empathy from housing officers

This came up many, many times and direct quotes about this appear throughout the report. It came up in interviews, in the survey and at the Zoom meetings. A number of us have also directly felt this ourselves.

when you complain about your temporary accommodation condition or family hardship and request a review and they send you Final Warning letter with a notice to quit will be served unless your arrears are cleared. while arrears could be small amount and historic.

Maladministration and poor communications

There are numerous reports of documents sent in being lost in housing services, sometimes not once but twice. Also loss of evidence of calls and conversations that took place. Again, this has also happened to a few of us. Some people have even suggested that this is a deliberate action to palm people off. The fact that some people believe that the Council would do this deliberately is deeply concerning. People who took part in the survey and on Zoom meetings also talked about the lack of clear, honest information. For many the bidding system operates like smoke and mirrors to deliberately obfuscate.

More support and care from council is needed. More care when dealing with cases- eg. Misplaced documents - after suppling years of documents - they were lost by Council.

Misrepresentation of timescales people will have to wait on the register

This is another issue that came up in interviews, in the survey and at the Zoom meetings. People reported being told they would be in temporary accommodation for a few years, only to find they were still in temporary accommodation, ten, fifteen and even twenty years later. In the survey on question 13, ninety people complained about the excessive waiting times in TA on RBKC's register.

Even if the wait will be long, you can mentally come to terms with it, prepare and plan your life. It is the lack of transparency and certainty that creates problems and distrust - sometimes it feels that what she is being told is all lies.

Impact on life of being in Temporary Accommodation long term

The impact on the lives of people in Temporary Accommodation for years is very damaging to health, mental health, children's education and to employment. The uncertainty is very damaging. The not knowing when you might have to move is very damaging and in a number of instances, even more so during lockdown, the very poor conditions of the properties is very damaging. The length of time living in temporary accommodation erodes the human capacity to cope removing all reserves. Again, a few of us know this from our own experiences.

"Our family mental health has been damaged..... Always living in bad conditions – the children growing up are already angry with the world. My daughter has asthma from poor living conditions - especially affected by the mould. You can't be productive when you don't have a safe place to live.

Lack of suitable properties/waiting times

There is a lack of social housing in Kensington and Chelsea and while people are told they will wait in temporary accommodation, in overcrowded, inaccessible or unsuitable homes for "a few years," the reality is that this can be up to 20 years. Council's data clearly shows a very uneven playing field for wait times. People who need accessible homes and larger three and four bedroom homes have to wait far, far, longer, as it seems do people placed in temporary accommodation outside K&C

Disabled people don't have choice - this is disgusting and clear discrimination. Please allow them unlimited refusals of properties that they think do not meet their needs. The fact they are disabled doesn't mean they shouldn't have a right to choose!!!

Out of sight, out of mind

Over seventy five percent of people in temporary accommodation are placed outside of the borough. That is more than 1,500, households placed in other London borough or outside London. The homes of applicants placed outside RBKC are managed through third parties. Once placed outside, RBKC seems to wash their hands of these households, asking them (when it suits) to get support from their new locality. This offsetting of responsibility disadvantages those outside of the borough and it appears from the data to jeopardise their right of achieving permanent social housing and receiving adequate care within K&C.

*I wrote to my RBKC MP, who has 'represented' me my whole live in RBKC and they told me that I wasn't eligible for help as I was in Bethnal Green, I was Bethnal Green's **problem**. I wrote to the local MP for Bethnal Green, they told me I was placed here from RBKC so I was RBKC's responsibility.*

One transparent system

The council runs a points-based bidding system and a direct offers system. In theory the direct offers are for exceptional circumstances but the council's data shows that a quarter of all lettings between 2014 and 2020 (fluctuating between 15% and 60%) are awarded through this method. Also each year people in TA within the borough are awarded permanent properties at an equal rate to those out of borough despite out of borough households being three times as numerous.

The council needs to be transparent on the bidding system and honest with tenants.

Recommendations

To address these issues, we want the council to make a number of changes to improve the Housing Allocations Scheme and its delivery. Some of the solutions are relatively cheap, and can happen within a year but do require a culture change; others involving new or redesigned or refurbished properties are more expensive and longer term.

Better information and systems – given the many reports of document and data loss it seems vital that the document and file management processes and systems are reviewed and improved. No one should need to bring in or send in documents to housing officers two or three times and all telephone conversations and email correspondences should be noted.

In addition, current information needs revising and clear information, advice and guidance needs to be provided to everyone on the register in future. Housing Matters should also be used to provide information on housing lettings and provide a platform for resident testimonies and critiques of council services.

This would be a good first step to reducing cynicism among people in council houses and temporary accommodation about the council's services.

Staff training - its difficult working with so many people in need and in trauma every day and this can effectively wear away empathy and understanding if the organisation does not support staff to maintain a compassionate way of working. From the evidence we have heard as well as from our own experience we believe that the Council needs to retrain staff, possibly in trauma informed work and build a system around them and a new work culture to support them to be respectful of customers and be empathetic to their needs. The Council also needs to review whether there are enough staff to do this.

This would be a great second step in reducing cynicism about the council's housing services.

Points on the allocation scheme – there should be points on the scheme for length of time people are waiting on the Housing Register. No one should be waiting over ten years in temporary accommodation unless they have asked in writing to remain in their current home because of their families links to schools and jobs in their new location.

This would begin to restore some faith in the scheme.

Better deal for people in Temporary Accommodation – people in TA have no voice, especially those out of borough. To remedy this a representative body for people in TA needs to be developed. The Council have said they will develop this but we need to see plans and a timescale. Also the Council needs to

provide regular contact with people in TA, possibly through a quarterly update letter, providing a named case officer and an annual review.

The Council should also push for a London wide review, working with the GLA and all London boroughs so that people in TA have absolute clarity on which council and which MP, Assembly Member or Councillor is responsible for each of their services and representation.

This will ensure people in TA are in sight and in mind.

More suitable properties – while we accept that the council cannot suddenly develop thousands of new properties in the next five years there does need to be:

- An audit of all social housing carried out, who it belongs to (i.e. council or housing trust etc) so that the reality of what's available to people is made transparent. This should also include a map of properties owned by the Borough so people can truly see what is the reality of housing in the Borough.
- Work with local residents to ensure planned new build and refurbishments include a higher percentage of accessible homes and ensure local disabled people are involved in all stages of the process, including planning and design.
- Work with local residents to ensure planned new builds and block refurbishments include a higher percentage of three and four bed properties.
- Work with local residents including people with learning difficulties and those who support them to ensure refurbishments and new builds incorporate life-time home standards and additional higher specification standards around aspects such as sound proofing.

This will begin to show that the Council is taking co design seriously.

Greater transparency in the bidding system - Clear and transparent bidding system so people better understand where they stand and why. This needs to include regular correspondence as outlined in better information and systems and in reinstating the information about each let regarding the points and length of time waiting for the person who has the winning bid or the direct offer.

This will evidence that the Council is finally beginning to listen to people on the Housing Register.

Finally, for this consultation to be valid, the Council must address these recommendations. They must say what they will do and when they will do it. We want to know what reforms or transforms they will implement and to know how we will measure the results. What will, in reality and without a doubt, change!

Abbas Dadou	Lancaster West Residents Association
Amelia Mustapha	Saint Mary Abbots Rehabilitation and Training
Azkar Shah	Cremorne Resident Association
Carla Camilleri	Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea
Keith Benton	Trellick Tower Residents' Association
Megan Redhouse	Nucleus Advice Centre
Muna Ali	Temporary Housing Representative
Nick Burton	Former Grenfell Tower resident
Pam Bardouille	St Quintons Park Estate
Sue Redmond	Full of Life Disabled Families Group
Tony Auguste	Former Golborne Rep
Wafaa Salim	Temporary Housing Representative

2. Key Findings:

Introduction

When NewmanFrancis took on this piece of work, we thought that we would be writing a semi-technocratic report about the workings of the Housing Allocations Scheme in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). We have rigorously gathered the statistics and numbers that fulfil the initial brief, and these are in our report in sections 5, 6 and 7. We believed that tweaks to the current system would help to make the process fairer and more transparent. We believed this up until the point that we began to interview people on the Housing Register.

What we heard then was how the scheme is being administered. We heard that the approach taken is causing heartache, trauma and abject misery for thousands of families - families who feel marginalised, disrespected and sometimes detested. Respondents described interfaces with a bureaucracy that has stopped providing a respectful customer response, where phones are frequently hung up on them, where they feel that they are not listened to and not heard. Recalling and recording the detail was often upsetting for both parties.

While some of this will be based on an inability of housing officers to provide solutions - and we developed a picture of housing officers who are quite ground down - there is no excuse for a service that provides inadequate information to service users or little customer service or indeed blames the customer for their predicament.

Many commentators will argue that their situations cannot be remedied fully unless housing policy in London and possibly the UK changes. This is true to an extent, but the Housing Allocations Scheme and its administration can be improved by the Royal Borough even within such wider constraints.

Unifying themes are a lack of help, support or empathy from housing officers, together with maladministration (loss of documents, loss of evidence of calls and conversations) and misrepresentation of timescales people will have to wait. The result for residents is a bureaucracy that many find to be Kafkaesque. They want some clarity, they want to know where they stand, and currently, the administrative process does not provide anything close to this for them.

It isn't the points-based system or a band system – it is about the application of the system and the way the workers are applying it. The bidding system doesn't work – I have spent three years bidding with 1,900 points and still nothing for me and my five children. I don't think points or bands or anything will make a difference unless they actually sort out the system, how they apply it and the number of large properties they actually have. If I have 1,900 points for three years and still don't have a property, then I don't understand how others can be getting houses at all? I simply do not trust the system – there needs to be transparency. If there isn't any transparency, then surely even they know it isn't working?

Sections of the report

The report is divided into a number of sections, largely reviewing the results from different consultative methods. Quotes from meetings and interviews, and surveys are in blue text boxes.

Section 3 explains the brief and methodology of our work. The early resident engagement took place in January with voluntary organisations and community groups and with the public in February and March 2021. It was all conducted during a Covid lockdown. It also highlights the need for better data and consistent reporting.

Section 4 of the report explains the process for the recruitment and business of the Housing Allocation Community Advisory Group (CAG). Members of the CAG have played a vital role in challenging our work and asking for more information from the Council.

In section 5, we relate the conversations at the six public Zoom meetings held in February and March. While many people joined the sessions to provide feedback on the Housing Allocation Scheme, a surprisingly high number joined to try to get help as they said that they didn't know where else to go or hadn't been able to get help elsewhere. A lot of people who attended the meetings said that their interactions with the Council had often been frustrating and made things worse for them mentally as they had not felt listened to or treated with respect. This very much proved the need for better communications and support systems.

In section 6, we report the findings from the survey conducted in February and March. Answers to the survey raised a number of themes, largely echoing those raised at the Zoom meetings and highlighted:

- the prolonged length of time people are in TA or are very overcrowded
- the need not just for more housing but for prioritising accessible and larger homes
- the need for staff with more time and inclination to provide respectful support and advice
- better and more timely information to people on the Register
- the need for a voice for people on the register in TA.

In section 7, we have gathered case studies both of people that have been successful in securing new Council accommodation through the existing processes and also of people waiting on the housing register. These case studies provide a rich and complex description of the lives lived for many families that are deemed legally homeless and RBKC holds a duty to house.

Findings

From this rich body of information, we have identified a great many issues and a knotty tension or competing agenda.

The tension concerns choice, competition, bidding and direct offers. People want choice but hate the repeated disappointments of bidding. There is a significant problem around bidding fatigue and disillusion; many families are told that constant bidding is their only hope of achieving a home. We spoke to a number of people who had come to believe that they carried favour and would be looked on more positively by housing officers if they bid every week. We spoke to others that believed that the bidding was rigged and that some people jumped the queue as there seemed no rhyme or reason as to why they may be third on one bid and 53rd a week later or why with 1,900 points, they still have to wait years for a new home.

The Council runs both a points-based bidding system and a points-based direct offers system. In theory, the direct offers are for exceptional circumstances, but the Council's data shows that a quarter of all lettings between 2014 and 2020 are awarded through this method (see table 3). Also, each year, people in TA within the borough were awarded permanent properties at an equal

rate to those out of borough despite out of borough households being three times as numerous (see tables 5 and 6).

This problem is at the heart of the system. Is the system administered in a way that can be evidenced to people on the Housing Register as fair and equitable? From the evidence we have gathered, it cannot. This must change to win back the confidence of service users.

I have been living in temporary accommodation for over six years. It has caused me depression and anxiety. I still haven't settled into my house because I am not allowed to decorate as it's not my permanent property. They put me on a bidding scheme which in the six years I've been bidding I have not been eligible for one property. It's a joke of a scheme and was made for me to not progress, move or leave my property. My mental health is getting worse as I am suffering from epilepsy. No one has reached out to me from RBKC within the years I've been living in temporary accommodation. My idea for your scheme is actually reaching out to the people living in temporary accommodation, seeking a permanent property. Help them, direct them and forward them to the right team that can make this happen.

Issues

Below are the other key issues that need to be addressed going forward:

1. The impact on people's lives of living long term in TA is evidenced in some detail. We spoke to many people who were traumatised and explained the impact on themselves and their children, covering:
 - Education – children needing to change schools with each move or travelling for hours each way to their old school. Changes of school mean losing friends as well as a place in the education system that they have grown confident within to go to somewhere that requires another new start.
 - Employment – some people lost their job when they were moved far from it, especially those people that needed to navigate schooling options for their children too.
 - Stress and anxiety – the temporary nature of housing and lack of security about where people might be next or how quickly they may need to move has caused many in TA great anxiety and impacted their mental health and resilience. This is even worse for people who had mental health problems before this.
 - Health – there were many reports of damp and mould affecting people's health.

From the testimonies we heard, families and individuals are not being treated in a way that recognised their needs or the trauma they are going through. They are not routinely directed to other services or agencies for the additional help and support they need.

*In the end, we were given three days' notice and were moved into an uninhabitable room by the Town Hall for nearly six months.
How do you pack up your life and move in three days?*

2. Not enough help, support or empathy from housing officers. We heard many reports from people on the Housing Register feeling disregarded and disrespected. People reported being talked down to with comments such as the "explanation is too complicated," others voiced that they thought this lack of respect was due to race, many reported staff hanging up on them. There were also reports of good housing officers helping to sort things out, but people saw this as good fortune rather than standard routine.

3. Lack of clear information on the options and processes. Many people reported that they did not receive the right information at the right time to help them understand what was happening and what options they had. This added to the trauma that many were already experiencing.
4. Poor record-keeping processes. A number of people talked to us and wrote to us about the repeated loss of documents and loss of evidence of calls and conversations. While each

I find it extremely frustrating because no one is ever honest to you about lengths of wait times, they either ignore you or lie and give you hope and then it's even worse. Being kept in the light. Accountability and transparency of the department MUST improve. I'm aware this isn't totally relevant to additional lists, but if they cannot make a single housing list fit for purpose, why make many?

example is maladministration, together, they suggest record-keeping systems that do not work or staff that don't have the time to follow-up. Added to this, there is evidence of data gaps and inconsistencies in reporting.

5. The length of time many people are having to wait in TA is debilitating for them and their families. Added to this is the misrepresentation of the timescales people will have to wait. People did not understand why they were in TA for so long when they had been told average waiting times were so much shorter. They wanted more clarity on what was in store for them. The words transparency and accountability were repeated as wants, again and again.
6. New criteria. Arising from the online meetings, the survey responses and the case studies

Even if the wait will be long, you can mentally come to terms with it, prepare and plan your life. It is the lack of transparency and certainty that creates problems and distrust - sometimes it feels that what I am being told is all lies.

were the recurrent suggestion that points should be awarded for the length of time people have been waiting on the Housing Register. Other frequently repeated suggestions for new criteria were for recognition of extreme overcrowding, rewarding work of 30+ hours, rewarding voluntary work (so important for communities during Covid lockdowns), work as a carer and key workers.

7. People placed in TA out of borough report becoming second-class citizens in the process and Council data does not evidence that they are getting placed in permanent social housing at the same rate as those in-borough. There are additional problems for those placed out of borough in terms of services and representation. As they are out of borough, they don't have an RBKC Councillor, but the Councillors for the area they are placed in can't advocate for their RBKC housing. Likewise, for their MP and they have no tenant or resident association to advocate for them either.

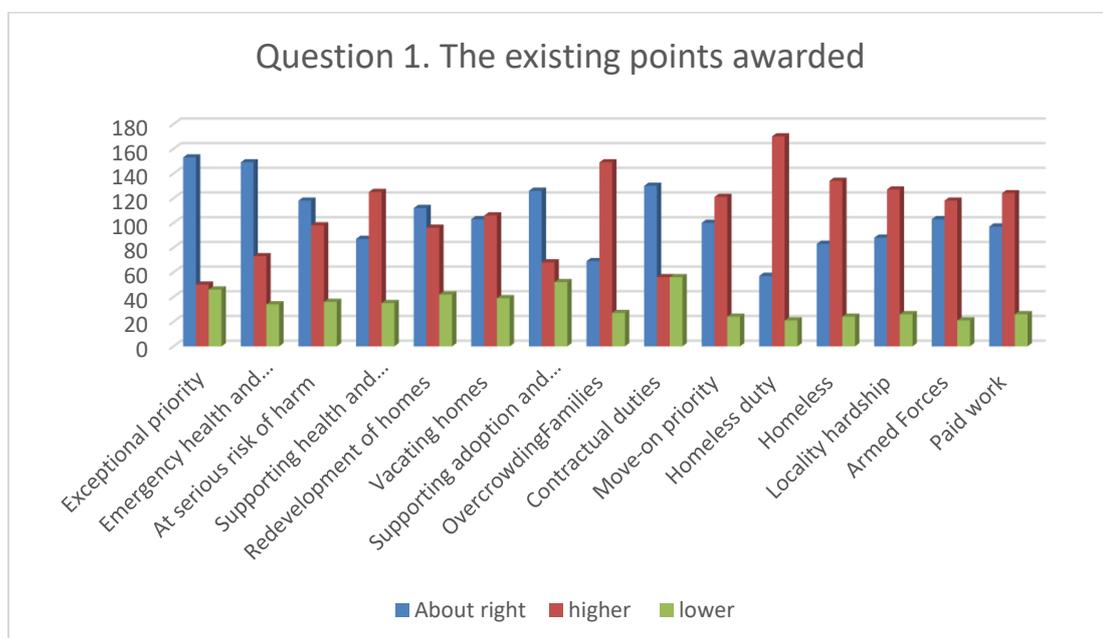
There should be a committee for residents in temporary accommodation so they can have a voice. My health got worse because of bad accommodation - I had severe damp for seven years"

8. Suitable homes supply. There is a general shortage of social housing, but people requiring accessible housing are reporting that they are having to wait far longer on the Housing Register than the average, as are people waiting for larger properties. This is also evidenced in RBKC data. Strangely there are also reports of people willing to move not receiving enough support to move from larger properties and properties remaining empty or void for months. Added to the shortfall of wheelchair accessible homes is the lack of homes suitable for individuals or families with a member with special needs.

"I was gaslighted left to deteriorate in this small room.... I would like to know why the council housing department think it is right for me to languish in this unsuitable accommodation, year after year."

There is also a widespread belief that the Council has a lot more empty properties that it is not using quickly enough (or at all) to house people.

9. There were many examples given of people living in very poor housing conditions. These were mainly from people in TA, but there was also an extreme case of someone in a housing association property. The major problems were damp and mould. Vermin infestations were also reported. Getting repairs or other work carried out in TA during Covid was also a big problem. Mould can have a detrimental impact on your health, especially if you have asthma, but we were told that it was not included in emergency repairs.
10. Additional points –The majority of responses to the survey identified nine of the criteria to receive higher points. Homeless duty and overcrowding were significantly high. The others where over 50% of respondents thought there should be more points were; supporting health and independence, homeless, and locality hardship should also receive more points.



Recommendations

The issues above provide a variety of challenges for RBKC to address. A few of the changes to improve the Housing Allocations Scheme and its delivery will be relatively inexpensive and can be delivered or part delivered within 12 months, but they do require a culture change; others involving new or refurbished properties are more expensive and longer term and need plans for their delivery to be developed and shared.

Transparency of the bidding system – the Council needs to develop a clear and transparent bidding system, so people understand where they stand and why. Sometimes this information will be difficult to give and to receive, but families have said that they want to know the truth about where they stand. This will involve explaining any other options people have. Aspects of making the allocations need to be reviewed to make outcomes more methodical and less luck based. Information on flats people bid for also needs enhancing with an agreed basic set of information such as rooms, flat size, postcodes, accessibility info and energy ratings.

There also needs to be regular correspondence (as outlined in better information and systems below), and the information about each let regarding the points and length of time waiting for the person who has the winning bid should be reinstated. Direct offers need to be part of this reporting too.

This will begin to address the tension at the heart of the system.

Staff training – staff need to pay better regard and demonstrate a greater understanding of the needs of people on the Housing Register, many of whom meet the housing officers at the height of difficulties in their lives. Social workers and counsellors have processes and systems to ensure that their work does not wear away their empathy. This is not normally available to housing staff despite them also working with vulnerable people and families.

To address this, RBKC needs to invest in staff training and continued support for staff to maintain a compassionate way of working. Many councils and council services are developing trauma informed ways of working to ensure they can effectively support people in their neighbourhoods. Should RBKC develop this approach or one similar to build a new work culture that is always respectful of customers and empathetic to their needs. The Council also needs to review whether there are enough staff to carry out this function effectively and respectfully and consider having counsellors in the team or seconded to the team.

If this is taken forward, it will alleviate issues 1 and 2 above.

Better information and systems – given the many reports of document and data loss, it seems vital that the document and file management processes and systems are reviewed and improved. No one should need to bring or send in documents to housing officers two or three times and all telephone conversations and email correspondences should be noted.

In addition, current information needs revising, and clear information, advice and guidance need to be provided to everyone on the register in future. Work on customer journeys needs to be worked through and in collaboration with people on the register to ensure that the right information goes to people at the right time and that it is also easily accessible on the internet. A section on frequently asked questions (FAQs) should also be developed (or refreshed if it already exists). It can use questions raised at the Zoom meetings listed in the summary as a starting point. The new FAQs page on the website could then be shared with all housing support agencies in the borough.

If these recommendations are taken forward, they will address issues 3 and 4 above and support the transformation of the bidding system.

Points on the allocation scheme – the revised scheme needs to consider the length of time people are waiting on the register. To do this transparently, there should be points on the scheme for the length of time people are waiting. People have suggested systems where points are automatically added annually or at certain points, such as 3, 5, and 7 years. No one should be waiting over ten years in TA unless they have asked in writing to remain in their current home because of their family's links to schools and jobs in their new location.

The housing service also needs to review the responses to the survey and include:

- Additional points for homeless duty and overcrowding and consider further points for supporting health and independence, homelessness, and locality hardship
- new criteria for recognition of extreme overcrowding, points for work of 30+ hours, for voluntary work and work as a carer or key worker.

Taking forward these recommendations will address issues 5, 6 and 10 above.

TA representation – people in TA generally don't have a representative body to speak for them as people in social housing do. For people out of borough, this is exacerbated by having no democratic representative to speak for them on their housing issues. They literally fall through the net. To remedy this, a representative body for people in TA needs to be developed. The Council has said they will develop this, but the plans and timescale need to be shared. Also, the Council needs to provide regular contact with people in TA, possibly through a quarterly update letter, providing a named case officer and an annual review.

This representative body should support people in TA, but it won't cure the democratic deficit. To address this, we suggest that the Council should push for a London-wide review, working with the GLA and all London boroughs so that people in TA have absolute clarity on which council and which MP, Assembly Member or Councillor is responsible for each of their services and representation.

Delivering on these suggestions will address issue 7 above.

Inadequate housing – from reports and photos we have seen, there is a real problem with damp and mould that needs addressing. This may need addressing in a post-lockdown blitz or moving families to better accommodation. Moving forward, not only those people suffering in inadequate housing and poor living standards in TA but all those on the Register in TA and social housing would benefit from an annual visit and review. Annual checks on properties condition and suitability and any changes to the individuals or families' circumstances have been suggested by a number of survey respondents. This should improve maintenance data and data on families.

Starting to tackle this will address issue 9 above and will also improve information and systems and relationships with people on the register.

Suitable properties – the Council's housing development planning needs to prioritise the types of units that people have the longest wait time for. This is accessible homes and properties with three or four bedrooms.

Specific actions

- An audit of all social housing carried out, who it belongs to (i.e., Council or housing trust etc.) so that the reality of what's available to people is made transparent. This should also include a map of properties owned by the borough so people can truly see what is the reality of housing in the borough.
- Work with local residents to ensure planned new build and refurbishments include a higher percentage of accessible homes and ensure local disabled people are involved in all stages of the process, including planning and design.

- Work with local residents to ensure planned new builds and block refurbishments include a higher percentage of three and four-bed properties.
- Work with local residents, including people with learning difficulties and those who support them to ensure refurbishments and new builds incorporate lifetime home standards and additional higher specification standards around aspects such as sound proofing.
- Provide extra support and options to people who want to downsize and free up larger properties.

3. Background and Process:

The commission

NewmanFrancis was commissioned by RBKC in November 2020 to conduct early resident engagement in the borough on the Housing Allocation Scheme.

It is intended that this engagement and consultation preceded the Council renewing the Scheme. This engagement will feed into the formulation of a new Scheme and formal consultation will then be conducted on a draft new Scheme.

The early resident engagement took place between January and March 2021 and comprised:

- Telephone conversations with tenants representatives and relevant local voluntary organisations to discuss the proposed processes.
- Development of and work with a CAG of tenants, residents, people on the Housing Register and representatives from the voluntary organisation that provides support for people on housing issues to shape the engagement exercise and report.
- Six public Zoom meetings.
- An online survey.
- Surveys, conversations and case studies conducted via the telephone.
- Correspondence via email.

This was all conducted during a Covid lockdown.

Prior to this, we conducted desk research and worked with officers in the Families and Communities Employment Service (FACES) to recruit local people to carry out paid work experience as fieldworkers on the engagement.

We recruited three local fieldworkers to work with us on the project. The fourth fieldworker was already an employee. The four worked on carrying out telephone surveys during February and March 2021 alongside a team leader. Their testimonies at weekly team meetings about how they found the telephone survey work challenging and distressing were so powerful that we asked them to draft reports on their experience. Their four reports are attached in Appx C. Together with their local knowledge, they could also speak other languages common in Kensington and Chelsea, which was beneficial to the project.

Information on the consultation was made public on the Council's website in early to mid-February, and the Council wrote out to all the tenant and resident associations and to everyone on the Housing Register informing them of the consultation process. A pdf brochure was also produced explaining the process. NewmanFrancis provided this information to all the voluntary and community organisations they had contacted and provided information on their dedicated web page. This web page also held the link to the online survey.

The original commission was for the consultation to take place through February and the results written up in a report and presented in March. In late February, the Council agreed to extend it for a month after CAG members suggested that they had spoken to a number of people on the Housing Register who did not receive the first letter. At this point (the beginning of March), a second letter went out to people on the register informing them of the extension to the engagement. This letter also contained a flyer about the engagement.

This second letter with the flyer successfully increased the number of people engaging in the process. In retrospect, the first letter should also have included a flyer that simply explained the engagement process.

The context

Housing issues are fraught in Kensington and Chelsea. Many people on the housing register think the administration of the system is broken. In addition, the borough holds great extremes of wealth and need. Any expectations that the wealth would ameliorate the need are disappointed and instead, it sets needs in the starkest of contrasts. The Grenfell fire disaster looms over past mistakes in housing policy and practice.

The new post-Grenfell, political administration has made pledges to work alongside tenants to co-design solutions to problems. This early engagement is set in this context.

The Allocations Scheme

The Allocations Scheme provides the priorities for allocating social housing to individuals and families in the borough. Housing authorities are required by the 1996 Housing Act to have an allocation scheme and can only allocate social housing in accordance with that scheme. Housing Allocation Schemes must ensure that a priority for rehousing is given to certain categories of people, including homeless households, households living in insanitary, overcrowded and/or unsatisfactory housing conditions, households who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, and households who need to move to a particular locality in order to avoid hardship. Councils may also prioritise other categories of people for rehousing based on local (additional) priorities.

The existing RBKC Allocations Scheme was introduced in 2014 and revised in 2017. The 2017 Scheme has five broad objectives for social housing tenancies in the Scheme, namely:

- 1) Tackling housing need
- 2) Ensuring appropriate use of housing and tenancy options
- 3) Promoting affordable housing options
- 4) Promoting mobility and reducing under-occupation and overcrowding
- 5) Supporting and incentivising work and training.

The full Allocations Scheme is posted on the Council's website¹. It covers:

- Housing options
- Succession and assignment
- Council tenancies
- Priorities and points
- Important provisions
- Important definitions governing applications assessments
- Allocation of properties
- Reviews and complaints.

¹ www.rbkc.gov.uk/housing/finding-your-home/housing-allocation-scheme-2017

The 2019-22 Housing Strategy provides a commitment to review the Allocations Scheme to ensure homes are allocated to those who need them most. Reasons for its review in 2021 include:

- The current Scheme pre-exists the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It therefore needs revising to take account of the duties to prevent and to relieve homelessness.
- Criticisms of the current scheme include lack of transparency, being too complicated and providing too low a prioritisation of non-homeless residents.
- The post-Grenfell strategy and policy changes - reiterating RBKC's commitment to serving residents in a new way with co-design where possible.

The aim of the Allocations Scheme is to distribute social housing to those most in need. In Kensington and Chelsea, currently, this is very difficult as there are so many more people in need the dwellings available to house them in.

Housing data

Council data shows that 7,055 housing units are managed by RBKC (Council homes) and a further 12,888 are managed by housing associations (registered providers).

Housing Sector	Number	%
Owner occupier	67,955	77.3
Private rented		
Social landlord – Housing Association/Registered Provider	12,888	14.7
Social landlord – Council Managed	7,055	8.0

Table 1. Housing tenure breakdown

The percentage of social housing stock is similar to the neighbouring borough of Westminster (22%), and social renters across London at 22.6%². These figures are approximate as different data sets provide different figures.

Council data shows that there were 3,291 households on the Housing Register on the 18th November 2020. Of those, 2,114³ households (66%) had been accepted as homeless by the Council. RBKC, therefore, has a legal duty to house them. These households are called duty accepted homeless.

The Housing Strategy 2019-2022 suggests that the 3,000+ households on the Housing Register waiting for a home or more suitable home experience an average waiting time of almost three years. For three- and four-bedroom properties, the average waiting time is seven to 10 years. **In reality, for many families, the waiting time is much, much longer than this.**

Turnover For turnover (the percentage of dwellings that become vacant each year), different data sets provide different figures. According to Housing Management Data provided by the housing department, the turnover of Council rental housing in 2019/20 in RBKC was 3.50%. The figure provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government⁴ (DCLG) was lower at 2.31%, but this covered all social housing (Council plus registered providers). A second figure of a 2.45% turnover for all social housing is provided by RBKC Housing Needs.

These figures suggest that the number of housing units that become available each year is roughly 465 (between 450 and 480). This number can house just 14.5% of households on the

² English Housing Survey, 2017-18

³ Figures from RBKC Annual Lettings Plan, 2019/20

⁴ DCLG Live Tables 2019

Register. In other words, 85.5% of those waiting will not be rehoused and even if no new people were accepted onto the housing register, it would take seven years to house those on it now.

The CAG asked for more data from the Council relating to placements in TA and lettings in permanent social housing. Figures received from the housing department provide the following annual breakdown. The reduction in numbers in 2017/18 is due to the need to prioritise survivors from the Grenfell housing tragedy.

people from the register who are rehoused	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20
	506	457	437	216	440	460

Table 2. Annual rehousing figures

The housing service was also asked for a breakdown of housing placements by choice and direct offer cross-referenced by scheme criteria. The data is below in table 3. This does not add to the numbers of total placements reported in table 2 above. It is 15 out for the year 2014/15, 82 out for 2015/16, 114 out for 2016/17, 105 out for 2017/18, 166 out for 2018/19 and 79 out for 2019/20.

People from the register who are rehoused		14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20
Exceptional Priority	Direct offer	2	0	0	1	5	3
	Choice based	1	0	0	1	1	7
Emergency Health and Independence	Direct offer	0	1	0	2	2	4
	Choice based	1	0	0	0	2	0
At serious risk of harm	Direct offer	4	2	1	2	0	7
	Choice based	13	4	3	0	13	8
Supporting Health and Independence	Direct offer	15	9	5	4	2	9
	Choice based	15	13	2	1	19	22
Redevelopment of homes	Direct offer	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Choice based	1	0	0	0	0	0
Vacating homes	Direct offer	6	2	1	0	1	0
	Choice based	13	7	3	1	3	4
Supporting adoption and fostering	Direct offer	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Choice based	1	0	0	0	0	0
Overcrowding	Direct offer	1	5	0	0	1	0
	Choice based	53	16	12	2	23	11
Contractual Duty	Direct offer	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Choice based	0	0	0	0	0	0
Move on priority	Direct offer	7	3	0	4	9	7
	Choice based	48	12	13	3	45	64
Homeless duty	Direct offer	122	150	150	54	20	65
	Choice based	188	151	133	36	128	170
Total	Direct offer	157	172	157	67	40	95
	Choice based	334	203	166	44	234	286
	Both	491	375	323	111	274	381
Total	Direct offer	32%	46%	49%	60%	15%	25%
	Choice based	68%	54%	51%	40%	85%	75%
	Both	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3. Annual rehousing figures

Housing staff have explained this may be down to a number of reasons, including inconsistency in the use of definitions and Housing Associations not providing data on lets within the financial.

This does not explain why the discrepancies would vary so much in different years. The inability to produce data that tallies creates suspicion and will not help in providing better information and evidence to people on the register.

Temporary Accommodation placements

2,166 households on the housing register have been placed by the Council in TA, awaiting permanent settled homes. Of these, only a quarter are placed within borough boundaries.

A list of all the local authorities where RBKC house people in TA, including the number of households currently housed there as of 13/04/2021, is provided in table 4 below. This shows that 22.8% of households in TA are placed in RBKC. The second-highest number is in Westminster and the third in Tower Hamlets.

Local Authority	Number of Households	%	Local Authority	Number of Households	%
Barking and Dagenham	83	3.8%	Islington	24	1.1%
Barnet	71	3.3%	Kensington & Chelsea	494	22.8%
Basildon District Council	7	0.3%	Lambeth	4	0.2%
Bexley	1	0.0%	Lewisham	5	0.2%
Brent	171	7.9%	Medway	1	0.0%
Camden	12	0.6%	Mole Valley	2	0.1%
Croydon	16	0.7%	Newham	44	2.0%
Dartford	1	0.0%	Redbridge	62	2.9%
Ealing	102	4.7%	Richmond	2	0.1%
Enfield	143	6.6%	Runnymede Borough Council	1	0.0%
Epping Forest	5	0.2%	Slough	1	0.0%
Greenwich	12	0.6%	Southend	1	0.0%
Hackney	60	2.8%	Southwark	7	0.3%
Hammersmith & Fulham	41	1.9%	Thurrock	9	0.4%
Haringey	29	1.3%	Tower Hamlets	205	9.5%
Harrow	29	1.3%	Waltham Forest	18	0.8%
Havering	60	2.8%	Wandsworth	108	5.0%
Hillingdon	26	1.2%	Watford	1	0.0%
Hounslow	22	1.0%	Westminster	286	13.2%
			Grand Total	2166	

Table 4. Local authorities RBKC has placed households in TA

Tables 5 and 6 below show that although people in TA outside of Kensington and Chelsea make up over 75% of those in TA, each year they receive fewer permanent placements than those in TA within the borough. There may be reasonable explanations such as those placed in Kensington and Chelsea having higher needs in the first place, but until this is investigated and explained, this does not seem to be fair or impartial.

Numbers of households from the register who are rehoused	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20

From temp accom outside RBKC	125	135	41	64	110
From temp accom from inside RBKC	172	140	48	79	116
From existing social housing and other	156	154	126	292	225
Permanently outside RBKC	19	12	5	7	9
Totals	472	441	220	442	460

Percentage of households from the register who are rehoused	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20
From temp accom outside RBKC	26.5%	30.6%	18.6%	14.5%	23.9%
From temp accom from inside RBKC	36.4%	31.7%	21.8%	17.9%	25.2%
From existing social housing and other	33.1%	34.9%	57.3%	66.1%	48.9%
Permanently outside RBKC	4.0%	2.7%	2.3%	1.6%	2.0%

Table 5. and 6. Numbers and the percentages of households moving into permanent accommodation

London

Kensington and Chelsea has one of the highest rates in London of homeless people living in TA. This is likely to get worse.

In terms of housing need, the Shelter report, "Homeless and Forgotten,"⁵ published in December 2020, identified that:

- over 250,000 people in England were living in TA during the first stages of the pandemic
- 68% of all homeless people living in TA are in London (1 in every 52 people living in London)
- the economic fallout of 2020/21 will deepen this crisis.

In London, Kensington and Chelsea has the third-highest rate of homeless households in TA, with 1 in 29 people living in this type of homeless accommodation. This is just after Haringey (1 in 28 people), Kensington and Chelsea (1 in 29 people) and before Westminster (1 in 32 people). Any further increase in actual figures is likely disproportionately to affect the ranking of the Royal Borough. The data in table 7 below is from the Shelter report.

National rank	Local authority	Number of homeless people in TA	Rate of homeless people in TA
1	Newham	15,548	1 in 23
2	Haringey	9,521	1 in 28
3	Kensington and Chelsea	5,406	1 in 29
4	Westminster	8,243	1 in 32

Table 7. Top four areas with the highest rates of homeless people in TA in England

5

https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/report_homeless_and_forgotten_surviving_lockdown_in_temporary_accommodation

4. The Community Advisory Group:

Purpose and formation

The Housing Allocations Scheme CAG was established to:

- comment on the existing Housing Allocations Scheme
- review the early engagement process on the Housing Allocations Scheme and comment on the appropriateness of all elements of and prioritisation of the scheme
- help shape the values, priorities and processes underpinning the future scheme
- comment on the report drafted by NewmanFrancis before its submission to the Council.

NewmanFrancis wanted the group's membership to reflect the make-up of people living in Kensington and Chelsea's housing estates, on the housing register and living in other social housing in the borough. We also wanted a few people who were housing advice workers in the borough to join the group. The Council endorsed this approach.

In terms of qualifications to be on the group, the criteria were that members needed to have experience of:

- facilitating wider tenant engagement within the borough or
- direct experience of the allocations process or
- experience of supporting people through that process.

From our discussions with tenant and resident representatives and voluntary organisations in January, we identified most members of the group and then pursued people to fill what we saw as gaps in the group's geographical spread and it not having enough reps who were living in TA. The last three positions were filled a week before the first meeting, one volunteering from a Zoom meeting, and the other two via phone follow-ups.

The CAG is, therefore, a group of community leaders, activists, participants and support organisations that have come together to think about Kensington and Chelsea's Housing Allocation Scheme and how it works or doesn't work for the people upon whom it impacts.

Once all twelve members were in place, the group was established as a task and finish group, originally only set to meet three times. However, once in place and with the consultation period extended, it needed to meet more times. Due to Covid, all meetings took place on Zoom.

Meetings

The original intention was to hold three meetings with the CAG. Even before the engagement was extended for a month, it had become obvious that more meetings would be needed to properly work alongside and report findings to the group. At the time of writing, eight meetings have been held. Dates and agenda summaries of the meetings are below:

22nd February – the first meeting at which the members of the CAG met each other, the NewmanFrancis staff and the two RBKC officers commissioning this project and:

- the Terms of Reference were discussed and agreed
- an explanation was given of the work so far and early findings presented
- a discussion was held on the next steps
- dates of future meetings were agreed.

9th March – the second meeting where updates since 22nd February were given and it was agreed to hold a meeting with the Director of Housing later in the month.

16th March – special short meeting to agree on questions for Director of Housing.

23rd March – additional meeting with the Director of Housing to answer questions posed by CAG members.

6th April – a meeting to discuss and agree the framework for the report.

12th April – additional special meeting with just two CAG members and Council officers to review data gaps.

21st April – a meeting to discuss the first draft of some of the sections of the report.

29th April – the meeting discussed and amended the draft Statement of the CAG.

CAG members will also meet with housing officers to discuss the report's findings once the Council has digested them. They may also be asked to work with the Council after this on co-design input into the new policy.

Data and information

The CAG members had a number of data requests and a shared drive was set up for data, documents and notes of meetings.

An additional meeting was set up on 12th April to look at gaps in data and this work is still continuing. Tables 5, 6 and 7 above record some of the data that CAG requested. Recommendations on data recording and accuracy will be made to help increase transparency and effective communications.

5. Zoom Meetings:

Over February and March, we held six Zoom meetings for the public. They were held at different times on different days to try to maximise people's opportunity to join them. The four in February were on:

Saturday 13th at 1pm

Tuesday 16th at 7pm

Tuesday 23rd at 1pm

Saturday 27th at 7pm.

Once the consultation was extended, the following two additional dates were added in March:

Tuesday 16th at 1pm

Saturday 20th at 1pm.

The first meeting on Saturday 13th February, largely set the format for the others and followed the process of a welcome, introductions where people said what they hoped to get from the meeting, a presentation and a discussion. Officers from RBKC attended to answer any technical questions and advice and helpline numbers were provided to attendees.

There were not huge numbers at the meetings. The first two only had three attendees; all the others had around ten at each. There were 48 attendees in total. The first two meetings were poorly attended but gained in-depth what they lost in breadth as the participants had more time to discuss problems particular to them.

Themes that came out loud and strong from all the Zoom meetings were that Council services didn't provide enough information, follow-up, or empathy. Participants frequently voiced that they felt disrespected by staff who did not treat them as individual human beings.

Attendees, especially those who had been in TA for a long time, wanted an idea of the timeframe for getting secure accommodation. They wanted to make plans for themselves and their children and the transience of TA prevented them from doing this. They felt like they were operating in the dark in a system that didn't care enough. They found the bidding process difficult and ultimately depressing as they lost out again and again and again. The bidding process itself was a theme that came up at most of the meetings. There was a feeling that the bidding process was there to give them an unrealistic picture of what was on offer. It kept them engaged in a system that ultimately would leave them in TA for a very long time.

The dearth of accessible properties came up at a number of the meetings, as did the poor quality of a number of temporary dwellings. Quotes from the meetings are in blue text boxes.

The meetings

Only three people attended this **first meeting**. All three had come looking for answers as to why the system seemed to punish them. All three explained their experiences. In each case, interactions with the Council had increased their trauma. All attendees suggested that they didn't feel listened to and were not treated with respect.

The following are quotes from the meeting:

It's a horrendous experience and a really painful one. I completely lost trust in the Council and its officers. I believe that to the Council officers, out of the borough temporary accommodation also means out of their duty of care.

I have three kids in a studio flat, it's damp and my kids have health issues. The housing staff told me a letter from my doctor wasn't proof of this.

The worst experience for me with RBKC was the lack of information, I was not aware of the points for different things, including for work. The process is also too long, I have been in Enfield in temp accommodation for over ten years now and my kids don't want to leave the area as they have built their life here.

The second meeting on Tuesday 16th February in the evening had three attendees. It came up with a few issues that were different to those raised at the first meeting, including:

- The lack of representation and voice for people in TA. As they are out of borough, they don't have an RBKC councillor. There are tenant associations but not TA associations.
- Getting repairs done in TA during Covid was a big problem – and there seemed confusion on what constitutes emergency work. Mould has a huge effect on health if you have asthma but did not seem to be included in repairs.

Other issues were similar to those expressed at the first meeting, with people saying that they feel like their issues and problems are being brushed under the carpet rather than being dealt with. Also, the length of time in TA was seen as a huge issue.

Temporary accommodation is often at a low standard and you can't make it your own as you're always moving somewhere else.

The meeting welcomed the statement from the Council officer that there are plans to set up a TA representative body soon.

The **third meeting** on the 23rd had ten people present. The issue of the negative effects of living in TA was raised by a number of people. New issues that were raised were:

- placements in expensive TA mean that its harder to make work pay
- moves affect children's education badly

- moves from one damp temporary property to another.

I have moved three times within four years. The move affects my children's education.

I have been in temporary accommodation in Ealing for four years and am working part-time. My son is going to secondary school in two years. I need to know how long it will be before I will have permanent accommodation. I can't make decisions until then.

The meeting identified a number of changes they would like to see to the current system and processes, including:

- Greater transparency and clarity on how the system works.
- Put a rent cap/threshold so people can comfortably afford it if they work full-time.
- For properties you bid for, the Council needs to provide full postcode and details of the inside and outside of the flat before people bid on it. Also, energy labels.
- Improve and train customer service officers. Housing officers need to treat tenants and people in temp accommodation with respect and dignity.
- Provide a better time frame.
- Improve the complaint process.
- Improve the quality of overall work by officers when dealing with property stock.

The **fourth meeting** held on Saturday 27th had a further nine attendees. Again, the lack of control over lives in TA was a theme and this, together with a lot of questions about how the bidding system worked, dominated the meeting.

Moving people out of borough in temporary accommodation is the most disruptive thing you could do as it upsets support networks, friends, family, school, jobs, carers – just absolutely everything.

I've been in temporary accommodation for 16 years – I really want to understand the bidding mechanics and general operating of the scheme and how allocation of properties in RBKC works.

Specific questions asked were:

- How and why does the bidding system seem so unreliable, and I come in at different places every time?
- Why are direct offers used often, if at all?
- The bidding system simply doesn't work – how are RBKC intending on fixing it?
- How does RBKC decide how and who to place where for TA?
- Why are people continuously moved around in temporary accommodation and why is it normally always out of borough?

- Allocation of points for working 16+ hours a week isn't good enough – there should be additional points for working 25+, 30+, 35+ hours a week as it's a lot more than just 16. People hit that, then stop.
- Is consideration given to how long an applicant has been waiting/on the housing register? Waiting three years, five years, seven years should be awarded additional points for hitting such milestones.
- Why can't we decide we only need a smaller flat we can more easily afford?

Because it is me my husband and my son, RBKC qualifies us to only be able to bid for a 2-bed property minimum. We are more than happy living in a one-bedroom property even a studio to be honest as we know our limits ourselves well enough to be able to assess our own living needs. Why can't I be allowed to bid for smaller properties? This should be allowed.

The **fifth meeting** was held just over two weeks later, on 16th March. There were 13 participants. Again, most participants just wanted to know how the system worked. What attracted points and why.

A new concern raised at this meeting concerned perceptions that the Lancaster West estate was ringfencing properties just to residents within Lancaster West.

Other questions were around the following:

- How many of the new 300 homes will be accessible?
- Shortage of properties - especially accessible ones.
- Whether there are other routes to permanent rehousing?
- Knowing when you will be rehoused – need for transparency within the housing waiting list.
- Are the chances of getting permanent accommodation in RBKC affected by my children attending secondary school in another borough?
- Can tenants in TA get financial support to move out?

I've been waiting for 13 years for a property. Bidders with disabilities are waiting the longest. Properties are not being adapted and assessed before being put into the bidding system.

The question of whether social housing could be ringfenced to UK citizens was debated. The majority thought that it shouldn't be, but one person strongly felt that it should.

The **sixth and final meeting** was held on Saturday 20th and was attended by ten people. At this meeting, a lot of people expressed frustration with their interactions with the Council.

Comments were made about:

- Bad communication, inadequate liaison with social services and incompetence is leading to a lot of problems.

- Stories being told about some member of staffs taking bribes
- Staff needing more training
- Need more to be done on language barriers as when someone does not understand the system, it is harder.
- The Council doesn't take seriously special needs issues like sensitivity to noise.
- Lack of information - our building will be refurbished, and we do not know what will happen to us.
- Sometimes good housing officers help to sort things out, but it should not be luck but a standard routine.

The group also had a lot of questions about how the allocations system, especially bidding, worked. Questions included:

- People put in temporary accommodation in another borough wanted to know if there was a process for them to stay there as they were now settled with kids in school etc.

I have extremely noisy neighbours and I have special needs so it can be a nightmare. People are not taken seriously.

- How long we have to wait in temporary accommodation?
- Do parents lose their status (when they live in temporary accommodation) when children get older?
- Why are there so few accessible dwellings?
- Why is it not routine to adapt properties to higher accessibility standards when they become empty?
- Does it affect my points if I don't bid? The housing officers keep telling me to bid, bid, bid but and tell me I am doing well if I have bid a lot.
- Why are we told to keep bidding on properties even when they are unsuitable?
- Can we visit the property before we accept it when it's a permanent offer?

How many times do we have to be moved between different temporary homes? We are concerned about our stability, my child has friends, and we need to know if we can stay in our temporary accommodation and not move again.

As a response to these and other questions posed at meetings, additional information was

I have 2 children, one with special needs, I keep bidding but nothing for my son is coming up, does it affect my points if I don't bid? The properties that are offered on the bidding web do not meet my criteria; I need to live on the first floor.

added to the dedicated consultation webpage at www.NewmanFrancis.org/rbkc/ largely under FAQs.

6. The Survey:

We gathered data for the survey in two main ways: through an online portal and through telephone interviews. We also sent out paper copies to people who requested them. Due to the quasi-legal nature of the Housing Allocation Scheme, the survey was complicated with no simple yes/no answers. A copy of the interview questions is in appendix A.

People who filled in the survey both online and over the telephone often went into detail on their own circumstances and so the surveys provided far richer detail on the impact of the Scheme on people's lives than we anticipated.

The survey had 13 questions. Question 1 had 15 elements to it. The other 12 questions were open questions.

We collected 262 responses, 166 online, 94 by telephone and two by mail.

Below is an analysis of the responses we received. Quotes from the responses are provided in blue text boxes.

Question 1

Question 1 aimed to identify service users' attitudes to the existing points allocated in the Housing Allocations Scheme. In relation to each of the criteria that attract points, respondents were asked whether the points were about right, too high or too low.

The criteria and the points currently awarded are:

Exceptional priority	2000	Emergency health and independence	2000
At serious risk of harm	1900	Supporting health and independence	900
Redevelopment of homes	900	Vacating homes	700
Supporting adoption & fostering	700	Overcrowded families	200
Contractual duties	200	Move-on priority	100
Homeless duty	100	Homeless	20
Locality hardship	10	Armed forces and paid work	additional 50

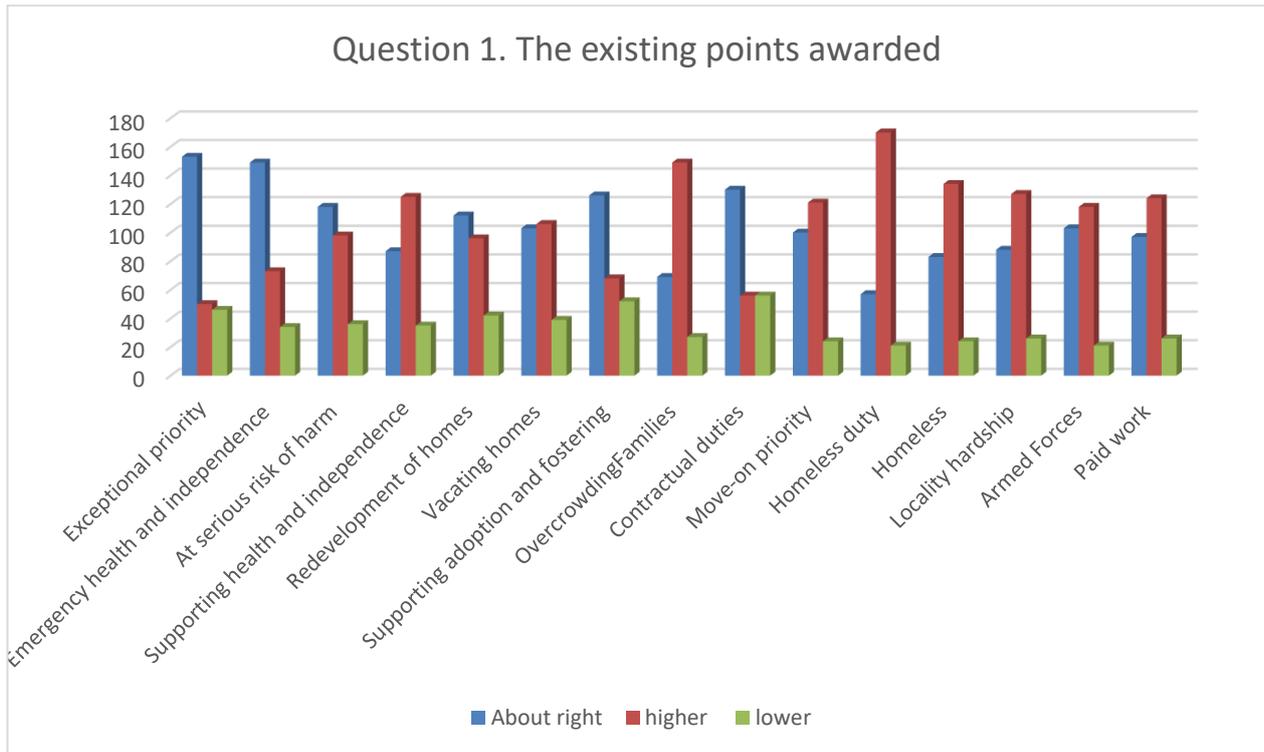
Not everyone answered the question against each criterion, but the overall response rate was high at 94%.

As shown in the table below, of the fifteen criteria, most respondents found six criteria (scores highlighted in green) to have about the right number of points. These were largely the criteria that already received the higher ranges of points. The two highest had clear majorities of respondents thinking that their points were about right.

Respondents thought the remaining nine criteria (scores highlighted in pink) should all receive higher points. The criteria these were highest for were Homeless Duty, where 69% of respondents thought it should attract more points and Overcrowding, where 61% of respondents thought they should have more points. There was also a majority of respondents who thought that supporting health and independence, homeless, and locality hardship should receive more points. Consideration should be given to increasing points for these criteria.

	Exceptional priority	Emergency health and independence	At serious risk of harm	Supporting health and independence	Redevelopment of homes	Vacating homes	Supporting adoption and	Overcrowded families	Contractual duties	Move-on priority	Homeless duty	Homeless	Locality hardship	Armed forces	Paid work
About right	153	149	118	87	112	103	126	69	130	100	57	83	88	103	97
Higher	50	73	98	125	96	106	68	149	56	121	170	134	127	118	124
Lower	46	34	36	35	42	39	52	27	56	24	21	24	26	21	26

These figures are depicted in the graph below.



Question 2

Question 2 asked: **Should new criteria be added to the system?**

Most people who responded to question 2 thought new criteria should be added. One hundred and thirty people said new criteria should be added as opposed to the 42 who thought there were enough and the seven who were not sure.

This was an open question and answers varied a great deal. There were a number of themes that arose from the varying contributions. The major themes that came out were:

Waiting times – 22 people said that more points should be awarded for waiting times. While some thought points should be added each year, others thought they should start to be added in blocks after 3, 7 and 10 years.

Overcrowding is the biggest problem on this estate – sleeping in the lounge is ok when the kids are small – it gets worse each year as the kids get older and want to stay up longer. Affected families were at breaking point prior to lockdown now they are broken.

Overcrowding – 21 people suggested that variations to the overcrowding category should be made. Again, the specifics ranged from chronic overcrowding to including overcrowding from same-sex sharing, ensuring there is no opposite sex sibling sharing, and additional points if there was sharing of a studio/bedsit.

Working and support – 15 people raised issues of more points for carers, for other key workers, for people working full time and/or for people doing voluntary work. The issue of working single parents was also raised.

They don't need to add criteria, they just need to be attentive to people. Those are the things that need to change. The care and respect that humans deserve needs to be shown to people.

Disability – there were a dozen suggestions about additional criteria for specific issues for people with disabilities.

I think they should add criteria that registers how long you've been bidding and in TA. I am a working mother with three children, and I try so hard to do my best. I want to be independent and out of the state dependent system but it ... feels as though, with the lack of information and transparency, that RBKC don't want you to get out of the housing system once you are in it.

The most extreme example was asking for extra points where the fire brigade had said they would not be able to rescue the person in the event of a fire. Other suggestions included where someone was totally dependent, chronic ill health and children's disabilities.

My mother is disabled (using a wheelchair and unable to take steps) and living in a fire trap at the top floor of an estate with no lift, so she has been housebound for seven years. Their lives matter, they have the right to access the outdoors or not burn to death at the top of a block of flats.... Because they have no other choices available, they stay put in unsuitable and dangerous accommodation. They have an obvious extreme need that they cannot meet themselves, therefore, they should be prioritised. Also, more points for the longer you have been on the register.

Hidden problems – a dozen respondents identified issues related to the Council not always picking up hidden needs. This includes both mental health issues and special education needs. Both needs are complex and require additional support and help. Families who have a disabled child/adult with learning disabilities said they couldn't isolate, and some disabled children do not understand social distancing etc. and so their management became very difficult not just for individual children themselves but for siblings and parents.

Local support needs – 13 people commented on the need to take into account the community networks, care and support needs people had where they were living. Children's educational needs were mentioned a number of times.

Community – 11 people thought points should go to people that had longer ties to the borough and few or no ties elsewhere. Examples included sons and daughters educated in the borough and still living there as adults and people living in the borough for over 20 years.

Trauma – separate but linked to hidden problems, six people suggested that there should be better recognition of trauma, whether that was severe local trauma, trauma caused by domestic violence, or trauma leading to suicidal tendencies.

Family breakdown and single parents – there were eight comments about considering the needs of single parents and the burdens on them to be taken into consideration, likewise the impact of family breakdowns.

Other – a few people also considered age to be a factor that should be taken into account with additional help for young people and old people.

A few other singular comments were made that can't be drawn directly into one of the themes above. There were three comments on rough sleeping, especially regarding women and young people on the streets. Other single comments included extreme poverty, current foul housing conditions, harassment from bad neighbours, asylum seekers and refugees, people about to be evicted, ex-offenders and orphaned children/young adults.

The Council should use empty unused properties. They should use community centres, empty schools, empty Council offices or similar facilities to provide "pop up" housing to get people off the streets because it is very unsafe for rough sleepers.

At the other end of the spectrum, four people suggested that there should not be points for overcrowding as it encouraged people to have children.

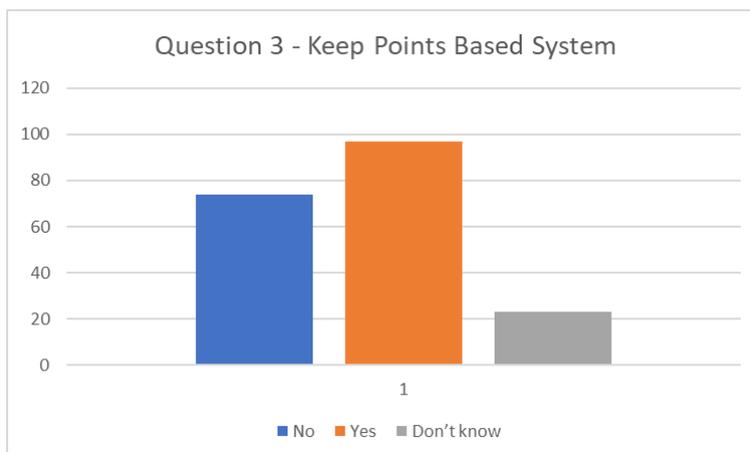
Question 3

Question 3 asked: **Should RBKC keep the points-based system or move to a simpler banding system?**

Responses to question 3 showed a preference for keeping the system but not overwhelmingly so.

Absolutely vital that the points system is kept. It will be highly detrimental for the system to be moved to banding.

While 97 people who responded thought RBKC should keep the points-based system, 74 thought the points-based system should not be kept and 23 were not sure.



Less complex system – of the people who did not prefer staying with the points-based system, 57 suggested a move to a simpler system.

Simple banding. The points-based system is very confusing and very difficult and stressful.

More transparent and easy to understand – similar to the first theme, 30 people said the current scheme is confusing or not understandable but that it needs more transparency, clarity, and information.

Linked to this theme, a further 23 people said that the system should change to a system (points-based or banding) that showed more transparency and fairness.

Tailored to individual circumstances – 28 people said that whatever scheme there was, it should fully consider people's individual needs and circumstances. That the process should look at each set of circumstances and treat each case with respect and consideration to them and their family's circumstances.

RBKC needs to treat people individually – treat people and cases with meetings in person or over the phone. Nobody has ever explained anything to me Whatever they do to the scheme – RBKC needs to be honest and open and communicate with the people of the borough about what is going on, how things work, wait times and realistic expectations.

The points system does not work – 27 people thought the current points-based system does not work.

Length of waiting time – 18 people said whichever system is used, the length of time you have been on the register waiting to be housed or rehoused should be taken into consideration.

Review aspects of the points system – 15 people thought that RBKC should keep the points-based system but review certain aspects of it, such as being more transparent and adding sub-bands. The allocation of points should be reviewed and assessed.

Need for more information about the banding system to discuss it – 12 people said they needed more information about the banding system to be able to discuss its merits next to the points system.

I have no idea what the banding looks like, you should've given an example. Anything that means level of need (understood as no access to alternatives, danger and risk to health/life) and length of waiting are factored in is a good thing. LENGTH OF WAIT NEEDS TO BE SCRUTINISED, MONITORED AND MANAGED.

There were a few other themes that came out, with seven people saying that whatever the system would be, it would not make any difference. Five people commented on the poor way they have been treated by Council and the need for more respect in the system and three people saying the old system was better.

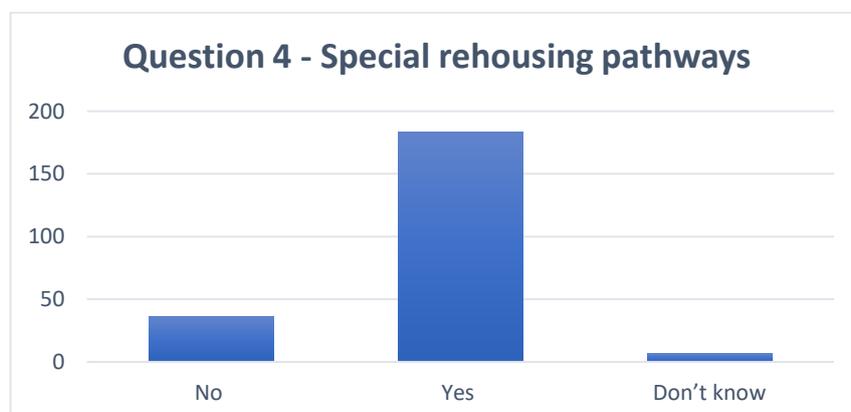
It isn't the points-based system or a band system – it is about the application of the system and the way the workers are applying it. The bidding system doesn't work – I have spent three years bidding with 1,900 points and still nothing for me and my five children. I don't think points or bands or anything will make a difference unless they actually sort out the system, how they apply it and the number of large properties they actually have. If I have 1,900 points for three years and still don't have a property, then I don't understand how others can be getting houses at all? I simply do not trust the system – there needs to be transparency. If there isn't any transparency, then surely even they know it isn't working?

Question 4

Question 4 asked: **Should we have special rehousing pathways for certain groups that have faced extra difficulties?**

The vast majority of people who responded to question 4 thought RBKC should have special rehousing pathways for certain groups that have faced extra difficulties such as care leavers, or those with learning difficulties, those suffering domestic abuse, ex-armed forces, street homeless/chronic homeless.

Of the 226 people who responded, 183 thought we should have special rehousing pathways, 36 thought we shouldn't and seven were not sure or didn't have a view.



Surprisingly, given the huge 81% that thought there should be special pathways, there was little agreement on what those should be.

Specific foci – 27 people said there should be specific pathways for the groups mentioned above. But in terms of specific other mentions of groups, there was great variation, as shown in the table below.

Theme	Number of times mentioned	Theme	Number of times mentioned
Disability	6	For people who waited too long in TA	5
Learning difficulties	4	Care leavers	3
Mental health issues	3	Homelessness	2
Special needs	1	Single parent	1
Those with trauma	1	Ex-armed forces	1
Ex-prisoners	1	Those who are at serious risk or hardship	1
Context of Covid - those with domestic abuse, violence rising	1	Minorities (discriminated) 1	1
Key workers (school workers, nurses, doctors etc.)	1	PTSD for health and care staff and others due to pandemic	1
Children who grew up in RBKC in social housing	1	Older people with a medical problem and living in a very crowded situation	1
Damp in temporary accommodation	1	Those that went through assaults, rapes, or prostitution	1

Yes, like me – we are homeless with 100 points, we have been waiting 15 years and deserve a special pathway or allocation of property. As I said it is a legal duty, so I feel we deserve housing after such a long time.

Yes, there should be pathways for complex needs - disabled, drug addiction - those people they may not even understand their needs, but need support and they also need help with the process of application.

A further 13 people answered yes but not for all the groups. Examples of these propositions are:

- Only for street/chronic/homelessness people (5)
- All the groups except the ex-armed forces (4) (except if they are injured and disabled for) (1)
- It should be a pathway only for the ex-armed forces (3)
- Only for domestic abuse (1)
- Only for those leaving care, disabled (1)
- Disabled people whose homes are not suitable for their needs (1).

Special needs and circumstances – 19 people highlighted the importance of looking at individual cases, needs and circumstances and having a special team to support and help them with a personal approach.

No pathways – 20 people said no to pathways. Reasons for this included the risk of it making the current system worse or more complex. Others suggested that it make the rest of the system take longer.

No because that could overcomplicate everything. The single system they have now doesn't even work effectively so just creating more pathways / "systems when the original one is hugely malfunctioning would be negative and counterproductive and unhelpful to those who need housing."

Management of system – ten people raised issues about the current management of the system by the Council and suggested that staff need more training and supervision to work with people on the Housing Register, especially those who are traumatised and/or have complex needs. Under this heading, the issue of honest and transparent information also surfaced, as did the ensuing lack of trust and frustration with the system.

Yes. It should also ensure that the staff involved in these areas have ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF these matters and needs, so that they are able to actually support the individual and not just tick boxes!

I find it extremely frustrating because no one is ever honest to you about lengths of wait times, they either ignore you or lie and give you hope and then it's even worse. Being kept in the light. Accountability and transparency of the department MUST improve. I'm aware this isn't totally relevant to additional lists, but if they cannot make a single housing list fit for purpose why make many?

Question 5

Question 5 asked: **How do you think homeless prevention should be better supported through the Scheme?**

This question produced a wealth of varying responses from residents and tenants on possibilities RBKC could take to prevent homelessness; the most significant responses were the top three reoccurring ones. These being: additional housing, support schemes (mental health, work, social care, and financial) and utilising all empty property/space possible in RBKC.

Should look more to people's lives and details. People with mental health are suffering and having a very bad quality of life.

Respondents to question 5 were passionate about ways to improve the situation for homeless households through whatever means at the Council's disposal. The responses showed that respondents are frustrated with the lack of support that goes into preventing homeless households currently across the borough by RBKC.

Additional housing – the most frequently occurring answer was to obtain additional housing. Fifty-three people said that RBKC could better prevent homelessness through the Allocation Scheme by building or buying additional units. On a similar theme, 26 people said that RBKC should aim to take control of empty and derelict buildings throughout the borough, along with unused land that could facilitate additional social housing.

We need to reduce local rental prices and we need to build more social housing; we cannot make homeless people not homeless unless we provide homes for them, nonsense question. They should increase the requirement for new developers to provide social housing to 70%. Too many properties are empty.

Support schemes – 45 people suggested RBKC should create support schemes for residents across a range of aspects. The most recurring suggestions focussed on financial and work support schemes. Residents highlighted that by offering effective support on such topics, people would be able to progress out of state dependency with financial skills and new knowledge. Respondents also highlighted the urgent need for mental and social care support schemes for residents going through the allocation and bidding processes, specifically those in TA.

Shelters – 16 responses suggested an increase in both the number of and funding for shelters and hostel-type accommodation for street homeless people and those in dire need of an initial roof over their heads to begin the road to recovery.

Problem is there are a lot of underlying problems for street homeless – mental health etc. Mental health support and housing officers equipped to offer families the help they need. Families need to know full range of options. Charities haven't got the knowledge and skills to help everyone get their rights.

Out of borough – 14 responses raised the idea of moving homeless households out of the borough if they wanted to be moved, ensuring the choice was given to the residents and not forced upon them. This sentiment was equally and concurrently echoed with the suggestion that RBKC needs to work with other London Boroughs to acquire more required housing outside of RBKC.

Affordable rents – 13 responses suggested that RBKC needs to ensure rents are affordable and need to introduce either a borough-wide social housing rent cap to ensure liveability for thousands of registered applicants for the next few years at a minimum, or they just need to ensure that the rents are genuinely affordable. Respondents noted that ensuring 'affordable' rents would be far more acceptable than introducing a static rent cap.

Funding – 11 people responded to question 5 with the answer that RBKC needs more funding to better tackle the huge issue of homelessness and preventing it within the borough. These responses were all cognizant to the price tag of land, building, property, etc., within RBKC and know that the significant and necessary changes won't be able to be enacted without large increases to housing funds in the borough.

No more sales – ten respondents suggested that RBKC stop selling Council properties off whether they be in 'bad' condition or not. Instead, RBKC needs to take the opposite approach and retain all current housing stock and focus on purchasing / acquiring as much property as physically possible within the borough to accommodate those on the register in dire need.

Honesty – eight people responded to question 5, highlighting that open communication, transparency and honesty about wait times, bidding and allocation from RBKC would make the world of difference. While such answers were aware that such behaviour doesn't/wouldn't equate to having their housing situation sorted, it would at least dignify applicants with the truth. This truth could enable them to plan, anticipate and prepare themselves for what they have in store for the potential next 5 / 10 / 15 / 20 years in TA while waiting with children, partners, jobs, family and illnesses.

Increased awareness and communication from RBKC to those in situations near homelessness. Having places to go for advice or help like other shelters would be good. Reaching out and being there for constituents.

Four people suggested that RBKC could introduce effective 'out of London' living schemes that would allow residents to permanently move to affordable housing if they wanted to. Another four people suggested converting larger properties into HMOs to increase capacity for those in housing need in RBKC. A further four people noted that RBKC could better support homeless charities like Shelter who are dedicated to helping the homeless effectively. By doing so, these charities would have a higher capacity for outreach and support. Three people highlighted that RBKC's focus to prevent homelessness should be to ensure that void Council properties are never left empty for longer than needs be and the turnaround of such properties should be paramount to RBKC housing department.

Question 6

Question 6 asked: **How can overcrowded families be better supported through the Scheme?**

This question generated very few yes/no type answers as the question was looking for ideas rather than a yes/no response. Only three people said yes and two said no, although 27 people did answer that they didn't know.

Age/sex threshold for sharing a bedroom – 26 responses raised issues concerning the legal age/sex thresholds for siblings sharing bedrooms. People voiced that different sex siblings over ten years old should not share and also have separate rooms from 18+ regardless of the sex.

Give priority/more points to overcrowded cases – 23 people thought overcrowded families should be supported by receiving more points, so they get rehoused faster. They claimed getting more priority in the housing allocation is essential for family wellbeing.

Build/get bigger houses – 12 people thought there should be bigger houses built or provided in the borough and that the Council needs to invest in buying properties suitable for larger families, not only small 1-2 bed apartments.

Provide housing in another area – 11 people thought that due to a shortage of properties inside RBKC, overcrowded families should be offered housing out of the borough with the freedom to decline without penalty if they wish.

Overcrowded families should not be supported – nine people thought families should not get extra support for overcrowding. They thought that overcrowding is not the problem of the Council but the choice of the tenants to have more children.

Overcrowded families are responsible and should be making wiser choices. Don't encourage it and help with it except in exceptional circumstances like bankruptcy and illness.

Individual needs basis – nine answers suggested that the most effective way to help families is on an individual basis where help is given according to their needs. RBKC needs to visit people and find out about their circumstances and what help they require.

Local connection – six people thought that families with the strongest local connection, such as those born in the area and have children attending school in the area, should have more support.

Split families into smaller units – five answers suggested that there should be an option to

Split families willing and able to and allocate two different properties to the family.

split large families into smaller units and they can live separately but near each other.

Key workers – not really linked to the question, but five people thought that key worker families, such as NHS staff and other essential workers, should have more support.

Other suggestions included adapting the existing property and adding bunks and screens, asking over 21s to leave the family, prioritise according to waiting time and giving them the freedom to choose smaller housing if they wish (e.g., if they are in one bed but need three, let them choose a two bed).

More points for overcrowding – actually treating families with humanity. I received a letter in 2016 saying I was a number 1 priority for a property then after three months I had a meeting with them and they said they had to give it away to someone for mobility and then they had an admin error so didn't tell me for literally three months. Me and my hugely overcrowded family were prepared to move and then I get told an admin error gets this. For us, 2-bedroom, 1 bathroom, third floor, no lift for me. We have to queue for the toilet and bathroom every single day – we have to use the bucket and bins to go to the toilet because of the extreme overcrowding and the horrible conditions that we live in. The Council simply needs to be prioritising downsizing applicants and building/buying big properties. Both methods will open up bigger properties.

Further suggestions talked about offering mental health support, providing RBKC visits and checks, capping rent, encouraging people with more space than they now need to downsize.

Question 7

Question 7 asked: **Should RBKC operate a closed register?**

Many London authorities operate a closed register, which means that residents must have lived in the borough for a minimum number of years before being able to apply to the Housing Register. In RBKC, this is three years.

This question generated a lot of yes/no answers and returned a resounding yes. One hundred and forty-two people answered yes, 21 replied no and ten replied that they didn't know or were unsure.

Question 7 - Should RBKC operate a closed register	
Yes	142
No	21
Maybe	10

Make it more than three years – 22 participants thought the closed register time frame should be increased. They felt as the Borough is under so much strain, only people who have been residents for at least five or ten years should be able to apply.

The minimum number of years should be increased to at least five to give the people on the current a list more of a chance to be rehoused.

I think it may need to be ten years.

Make it less than three years – on the other hand, 15 participants felt that three years is too

'I think three years is quite a long time to make people to wait to join the register. What if somebody moves to the borough and becomes homeless within six months then they would have to wait 30 months? That doesn't seem right to me.

Then at least the young people who have been born in this area and have still remained in the family home that is overcrowded might get a chance of their own space.

long in today's turbulent times and two years or less should be sufficient.

Period of connection – seven respondents suggested that you should have more points if you had lived in the borough longer. They felt those people should have priority over those who have lived in the area for less time.

Look at individual cases – six participants thought it's best to look at individual cases to judge whether someone can join the housing allocation list. 'If someone needs a home in extreme

cases should also be able to get housing - doesn't have to be three years. Study the cases individually.

Make exceptions for extreme cases – four participants thought RBKC should make exceptions for extreme cases, such as domestic violence or abuse.

Question 8

Question 8 asked: **Should eligibility criteria be changed or added to?**

This was overwhelmingly dominated by simply a yes, no and don't know answer by interviewees. Of 229 notable responses to the question, 88 people said they didn't think the eligibility criteria for joining RBKC's Housing Register should change. Thirty-nine people said they believed the criteria should change and 58 responses comprised people not knowing whether they should be changed or added to.

Question 8 - Should eligibility criteria be changed or added to?	
Yes	88
No	39
Maybe	58

Notably, a large portion of don't know responses was driven by two factors. Many interviewees didn't know enough about the criteria in the first place and therefore weren't confident enough to recommend what changes should be made if needed. Secondly, many responses indicated an unwillingness to comment on such eligibility criteria for fear of the system changing in response to our project in a way that could potentially negatively impact their own position in the allocation system and RBKC's register.

In a perfect world - a Utopia, it would be wonderful that social housing should be open to all, but this obviously is not possible. Now that the lack of equality of life has been eroded away, there needs to be a fair and newly reviewed selection.

Long-term residency only – outside of the yes, no and don't know responses to question 8, the most reoccurring theme from respondents was that RBKC should extend the number of years that residents need to live in the borough to be accepted onto the housing register. People talked about the significant lack of housing supply and how its allocation is somehow, or at least seems to be, continually going to people who have barely lived in RBKC. Such applicants were thought by a few respondents to be favoured over those who are lifelong residents due to the way the allocation scheme ranks priorities. These responses all indicate that they want RBKC to dramatically increase the length of time applicants must reside in RBKC to qualify for the housing register. One response highlighted the issue with children of long-term residents not being granted access to the register in RBKC despite long-term residency links.

While very similar to theme 1, a slightly different issue raised by six respondents said that the housing register should be for people born in the borough or those with a wealth of ties to RBKC.

Length of time waiting – five people stated that excessively long wait times must be considered by RBKC housing department and in the allocation scheme too when and how housing is given to residents as they'd been waiting for 10, 12, up to 16 years in TA. These responses evidently don't fit the question, yet it is clearly a significant enough matter that five people wanted to highlight the issue.

Review whole system of allocation and bidding – two people answered that RBKC needs to review not just the eligibility criteria allowing applicants onto the register but also the whole system of bidding and allocation. Respondents asked that eligibility criteria, rules around bidding and the allocation process all need reviewing.

Age of children – two people highlighted in their responses that they think RBKC need to take into consideration the age of children of applicants when considering who should and shouldn't be in the household within overcrowding parameters. These responses touched upon the idea that adult-aged children of residents shouldn't be classed as children of residents still.

Long-term unemployment – two respondents expressed that long-term unemployment should be added to RBKC's barring criteria for their Housing Register. These responses, again, were only mentioned twice like most of the identified themes to question 8. The interviewees' answers comprised of the ideas that people who are chronically unemployed seem to 'purposefully' stay in that way/kind of life perpetually and shouldn't be allowed access to RBKC's housing register.

Refugees – two people responded, commenting that RBKC's criteria should account for the degree of shelter and help that refugees require. While not an example of additional barring criteria, these answers were much unlike the rest of the themes identified in question 8. Again, only two people mentioned this theme, yet it is notable nonetheless as it highlights a niche enclave of refugees in the borough that clearly feel inadequately accounted for by RBKC's housing criteria more generally.

Current criteria need to be reviewed – two people responded yes to question 8 and continued to express that RBKC needs to do more than simply add or take away criteria for eligibility. These responses suggested that RBKC needs to review all current criteria one by one and think more individually about who it rules out and who it lets into RBKC's register and whether such current criteria at all are necessary/working.

Savings shouldn't stop you – two people expressed that they didn't think applicants having a significant amount of financial savings should stop them from gaining a place on RBKC's housing register. While neither person indicated a figure for 'significant amount of savings' – the current eligibility criteria, and allocation scheme, stipulate that nobody with savings over £30,000 has the right to access the register in RBKC.

Don't think all those criteria should be barring – community cohesion should mean that we have mixed communities. Current limits are too low as RBKC cos are so high.

The remainder of the themes that people highlighted were all only mentioned once. The themes included the following ideas for RBKC to add to their barring criteria:

- Criminals should be prohibited from accessing the register.
- Ensure nobody gaining access to RBKC's register lies or cheats the points system.

Question 9

Question 9 asked: **Should disqualification criteria be changed or added to?**

Currently, people who have supplied false or misleading information on their application for housing will be disqualified, as will people who:

- paid money to obtain a tenancy
- have been convicted of or had legal action taken against them for violence, racial harassment, threatening behaviour, any other antisocial behaviour, any physical or verbal abuse towards staff
- have deliberately made themselves overcrowded if they have no other priority for rehousing
- have deliberately moved into a property unsuitable for their disability or long-term health condition
- have deliberately disposed of financial assets and resources.

The majority of people answering this question gave simple yes/no/don't know answers. One hundred and seven people answered no, 91 answered yes, and 30 answered don't know.

Question 9 - Should disqualification criteria be changed or added to?	
Yes	91
No	107
Don't know	30

The majority of more detailed responses suggest that the main priority of tenants is that tenancies should be applied for and awarded fairly, that officers should try harder to understand their applicants, but that swifter, more decisive action was needed to deter antisocial behaviours.

Housing is a privilege for people who want to be part of a community.

Not giving housing is like not giving healthcare.

The disqualification criteria are right – the majority of those who had an opinion thought the disqualification criteria were about right. Six respondents thought they should be checked and reapplied regularly throughout tenancies so new offences could be taken into account; 47 respondents thought there needed to be more effort to ensure they were applied consistently.

Flexibility – 51 respondents thought that the disqualification criteria should not be applied absolutely, e.g., where convictions were out of time/spent, or that second chances might be appropriate where people had mental health needs.

We should review the term “deliberately” because people are affected by the decisions made by others. There can be pretexts and excuses to kick someone out as opposed to being a reason... Who can decide what is deliberate?

I believe in redemption and think people can change – not into cancel culture – forgiveness – if people are long-term violent and have had opportunities to change but don’t that’s one thing. So not into life bans.

Stricter guidance – 22 respondents thought there should be stricter guidance on what constituted ‘deliberate’; e.g., that an individual’s circumstances needed to be taken into account; and that natural family growth was not a justification for disqualification on the grounds of deliberate overcrowding.

There were a significant number of comments that deliberate dishonesty should be grounds for disqualification, i.e., trying to influence officials (6); misrepresentation designed to stack the points deck for qualification (22); illegal subletting (10); evasion of rent payments (1).

Additional criteria – there was significant enthusiasm from 26 responses that households should face disqualification for evidence of clear illegal activity/no known legal sources of income, or for aggressive bullying behaviour towards neighbours.

Anyone with a history of being anti-social, intimidating others or nuisance neighbours should be added to the criteria because currently nothing is done when homes are let to such people.

Currently there is not enough empathy for tenants who are subjected to this type of behaviour day in and out. If people knew this behaviour would affect their ability to be housed, they would soon stop.

There were also requests for exceptions to this for particular circumstances.

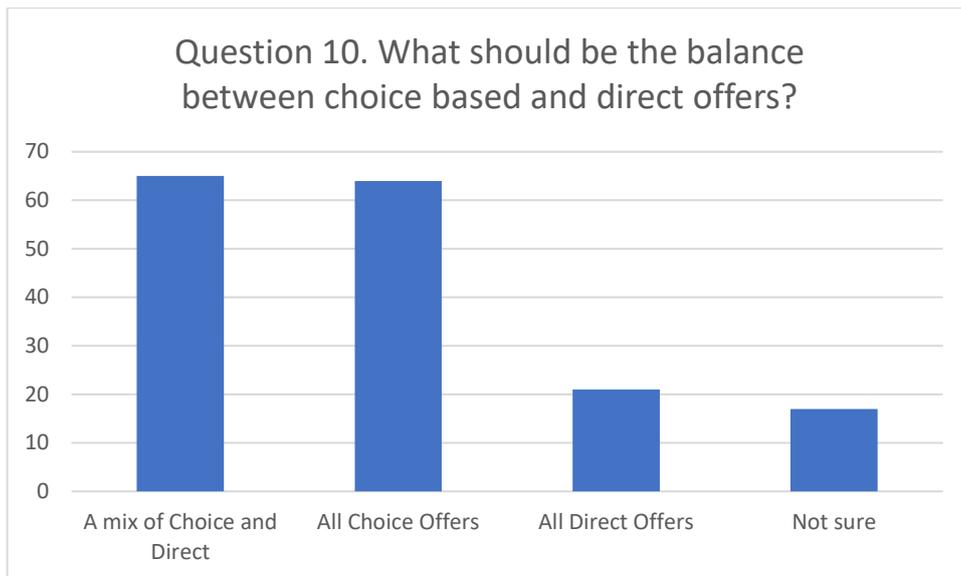
Question 10

Question 10 asked: **What should be the balance between choice-based lettings and direct offers?**

This question had less of a variety of answers than a number of the other questions, but the responses were numerically quantifiable. Most people answered the question, but a few answers were not directly relevant.

Choice based is best, it provides a tiny sliver of dignity in a terrible process.

Of the 167 quantifiable answers, 65 people said there should be a mix of choice-based and direct offers. Almost equal to that number, 64 people said it should all be choice based. Twenty-one said there should only be direct offers and 17 said they were unsure or didn’t know.



Thematic responses to this question were far more limited than those to a number of other areas

The most frequent issue that arose was mention of **choices and limits on those choices**. Most people who made comments in this area said more choices should be allowed before people were deemed intentionally homeless. They thought at the moment that too few declines were allowed, which made people hesitant. Additional comments were made about choice and direct offers and suggested that there should be more choice around direct offers.

The second theme concerned a **lack of choice for accessible homes**. A few people commented on the lack of choice for accessible property and that this meant that disabled people did not have any choices.

All should be choice based, we just need more flats on offer so there is an actual choice!

Choice based but with more offers from the Council that can be turned down before a penalty.

The third theme concerned the information about properties supplied to aid bidding. A few comments were made about the **lack of information** generally to help people understand the bidding system and also about properties to bid for and suggested that they should have photos

There should be exceptions for people. Could have committed crime when young and now reformed. Not giving housing is like not giving healthcare.

and room sizes and postcode before people were expected to bid.

A fourth area that received a few comments concerned the dirty **state of the properties** being viewed. A deep clean was needed before viewing commenced.

Other comments were made about peoples need to be realistic, and for the Council to be able to use discretion.

Disabled people don't have choice - this is disgusting and clear discrimination. Please allow them unlimited refusals of properties that they think do not meet their needs. The fact they are disabled doesn't mean they shouldn't have a right to choose!!!

Question 11

Question 11 asked: **Are there better ways to promote Housing Options such as the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme, HomeStart Scheme, Mobility Transfer Scheme.**

In answer to this, respondents provided a resounding 161 yes's, only 23 no's and 33 don't knows.

Question 11 – Are there better ways to promote Housing Options?	
Yes	161
No	23
Don't know	33

Awareness of these options seemed disproportionately low. There was general enthusiasm for such options as a way of creating more vacancies for applicants on the waiting list. One issue for respondents at retirement age was a concern that other family members were dependent on their tenancy and would not want to move; another concern was that hard-won services such as care packages would not transfer.

Advertise the options – a clear steer that RBKC needs to do more systematically to advertise these options; 48 respondents said they had previously been unaware of most or all of them.

Ninety-three commentators suggested that these schemes should be highlighted more strongly – even as 'banner' advertising – on the website, i.e., that applicants should be encouraged to consider these schemes first.

I am nowhere near informed enough about it and the Council should do a far better job of promoting it and giving people alternative routes. Because these could be really good options, IF promoted and applied properly.

It was clear that these packages are generally assumed to take tenants out of area and thus were thought inappropriate for anyone working locally.

There was an assumption that these choices would be most attractive to those with large families, those looking to retire, and the disabled. It was suggested that targeted promotions should use phone, emails, and via common social media groups (such as Facebook locality groups); but that there should also be posters and leaflets in civic centres and GP surgeries.

While options could be good for some people – targeting these schemes at everyone can be discouraging and worrying. Identifying the types of people who want these schemes before promoting them could help.

Add other options – 25 respondents thought the schemes should be added to, that a wider selection of charities should be allowed to advertise (and be funded to fill) vacant accommodation, and that applicants should be allowed to apply direct for stock in other housing authority areas across the country.

There was limited enthusiasm for the offer of financial or other incentives (18).

Support concerns – there was some evidence that people disqualify themselves from considering these options through concern that other key services, e.g., care packages, would be lost with a move.

I have heard of them yes but only just. Along with all correspondence regarding schemes, changing policies, updating tenancies, and those kinds of contacts from RBKC always seem too few and far between. The communication needs to be better, and they need to be more vocal on matters with us all.

Question 12

Question 12 asked: **Should there be a separate waiting list for intermediate housing routes.**

In answer to this question, respondents provided another resounding 153 yes's, only 42 no's and 31 don't knows.

Question 12 – Should there be a separate waiting list for intermediate housing routes?	
Yes	153
No	42
Don't know	31

Of the 226 responses from people to question 12, 42 people said they didn't think RBKC should introduce an intermediate housing scheme/waiting list in the borough. On the contrary, 153 people said they thought RBKC should introduce an intermediate housing list. The overwhelming majority of responses indicated that they think RBKC should introduce such a list with yes responses outnumbering no responses to question 12, more than three to one.

Thirty-one people responded, saying they didn't know. These respondents' don't knows were primarily driven by not knowing enough about the proposed list and the actual impacts such a change would make to the current allocation scheme/housing register and applicants. The overwhelming majority of responses to question 12 indicated that people think RBKC should indeed introduce an intermediate housing list. With 153 yes versus 42 no votes to the question,

the result isn't a close one either. Notably, however, it is impossible for these people, and their responses, to foresee how such a list would be implemented across RBKC and the impact that may have.

Hence why a significant proportion of yes answers were conditional upon certain factors and themes identified in the analysis. The conditions highlighted to be the most significant to RBKC residents if introducing an intermediate housing list in the borough would be to ensure safety and security of tenure, being transparent and clear to residents with the list's criteria beforehand and ensuring that attention and maintenance to the existing housing register don't decrease and the level of service with it if a new list were introduced as proposed.

Notably, a handful of answers understood the motive behind posing the idea of an intermediate housing list. They understood that, in theory, it would lessen the number on the current housing register and therefore speed up wait times and allow those in dire housing need to have it sooner.

The overall tone of responses was that intermediate housing would be a good thing for RBKC and its housing register applicants due to its potential to provide housing to key workers, speed up wait times for everyone and increase those in permanent homes borough-wide. However, many positive answers to the idea of intermediate housing came with conditions of security, safety, choice and openness and honesty from RBKC in both the application and eligibility criteria of an intermediate housing list.

Yes. It means that those who cannot afford private rents in RBKC, but can easily afford slightly higher rents are then offered properties that are suitable to them, which will then free up more council housing.

Security and safety for tenants – while question 12 is primarily a yes/no/don't know question, there was room for people to expand on their thoughts on the idea of intermediate housing. Thirteen people noted that if intermediate housing was introduced in RBKC that it would be imperative to ensure those residents going onto the list had both absolute safety and security of tenure. This theme occurred predominantly from people who said no, as their response was driven by the reasoning behind objecting to intermediate housing in RBKC. However, and notably, a handful of responses that highlighted this theme of safety and security of tenure were

Yes – people who can afford it should have a different list as it could help split up. But as long as you should be able to make a case for appeal. As in, let's say you qualify for intermediate housing then six months later you lose your job and are much poorer, then how will you be treated? There should be safety nets to ensure these people can be welcomed back into the social housing register if this happens. Safety net should be there 100%.

yes answers. But they were yes answers that specified that the yes was mutually exclusive with ensuring these two factors were promised/enforced by RBKC.

Dependent upon the intermediate housing list's criteria – nine responses indicated that a yes or no would rely upon knowing the list's criteria. This was the second most reoccurring theme from all responses to question 12. These RBKC residents didn't want to answer without knowing,

in full, every aspect of its application and how that would impact those moving onto it from the current housing register. RBKC would need to clearly specify how such an intermediate housing list would be applied across RBKC, who would be eligible, who would be forced, would there be choice and similar concerns.

Unlike the most reoccurring theme above, this motif was focused more broadly on full knowledge and transparency of a list before agreeing to one in general. Rather than demanding that RBKC guarantee certain explicit conditions are met.

Providing social housing standards don't drop – four people responded to question 12, stating that they would be in favour of RBKC introducing an intermediate housing list upon the condition that doing so would not, in any way, mean that the standards of the current housing register decreased in any aspect – support, communication, property numbers, staff numbers, and so on.

While only four people highlighted this exact concern specifically in responses, there were a handful of other respondents whose answers contained concern and worry over the idea that any kind of change or alteration to RBKC's housing situation for registered applicants through adding such a list could be negative to them and others.

Shared ownership/right to buy options too – four people answered question 12 positively with a yes and additionally highlighted that alongside introducing an intermediate housing list, RBKC should also strengthen their right to buy scheme by widening eligibility for it and introducing shared ownership schemes across the borough.

Such responses may or may not be aware of the financial complexities that surround such shared ownership properties within RBKC due to its exceptionally inflated property market prices – the average cost being £1.4million a home in RBKC.

Must ensure choice – three people highlighted that if an intermediate list were introduced, an element of choice would have to be woven into it. Such responses were worried that by introducing an intermediate housing list in RBKC, large swathes of people currently on the housing register would forcibly be moved onto the intermediate housing list by RBKC simply because the Council 'deemed them fit to be able to afford intermediate housing' or other such circumstances that would validate applicants to be moved up to an intermediate list.

Depends whether those choices aren't just forced upon people re adding them to that list. Based on what criteria?

Akin to many other themes highlighted in the analysis of responses to question 12, these answers contained worry and mistrust of the Council introducing or altering aspects of the borough's social housing as it might make their living situation/lives worse.

Prioritise keyworkers for intermediate housing – three people responded to question 12 by saying that intermediate housing in RBKC was a good idea, one person saying they know it works well in other boroughs where they have knowledge of similar lists/schemes in place.

These same people highlighted in their answers that intermediate housing, as currently is so in RBKC, should be primarily focused on being offered to key workers and allowing them to be prioritised for intermediate housing over others in their situation who aren't key workers.

Need more information on the idea – two people said that they would need much more information, clearly outlining how the list would work and who would qualify. Notably, these answers both identified that it is dangerous, potentially, to agree to things without knowing exactly how it would impact the current context in RBKC housing and the register.

Highly qualified people shouldn't be on the standard register – two respondents expressed that they think this is a good idea, yes, but also that in more general application of the scheme and its criteria that RBKC should disqualify/bar anyone in the borough who is highly qualified (university degree, high-level job training) from the standard register as there are people far lower down the ladder than them in need.

More social housing stock – one person explicitly stated no to the idea of introducing an intermediate housing list in RBKC in response to question 12. They were passionate about the fact that they believe RBKC would be better suited to investing their time, energy and finances into acquiring and building more housing stock as the existing housing register is extensive and has very long wait times of up to 18 years currently.

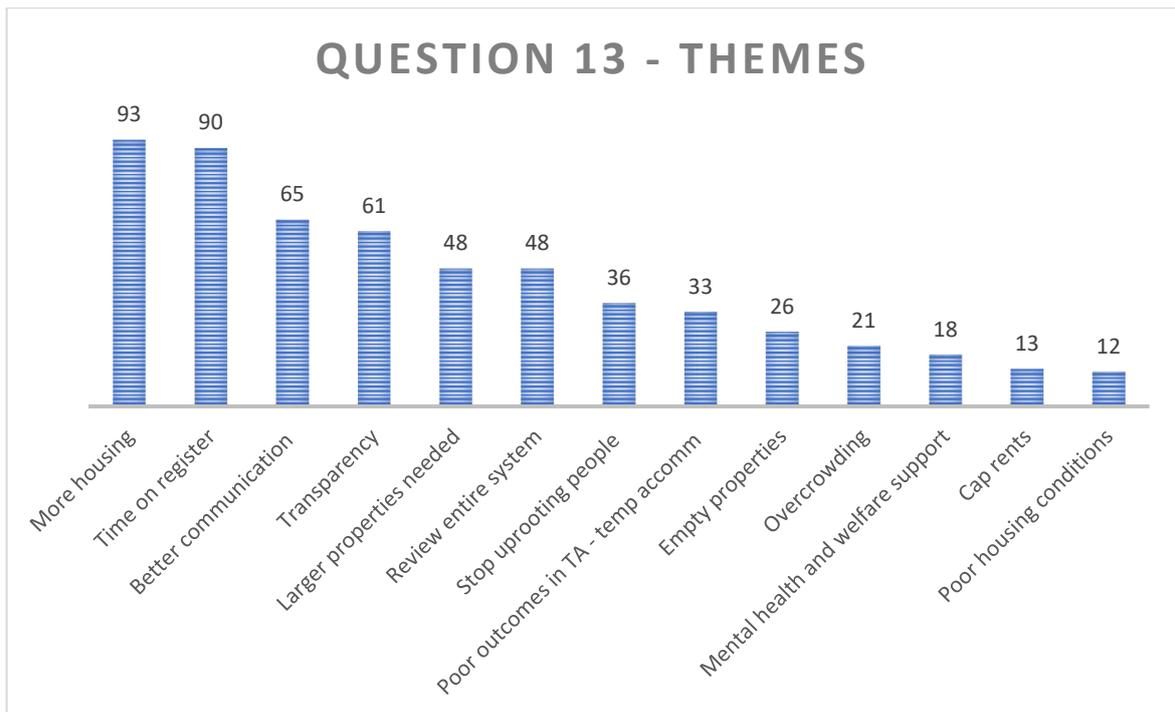
Question 13

Question 13 asked: **Do you have any further comments or observations on what RBKC should do?**

Of the 233 responses to question 13, 190 people said yes, they did have further comments and observations on what RBKC should do. The comments and observations made in answer to question 13 and the themes identified in these responses yielded a total of 30 themes with a total count of 650 for all as nearly all yes responses were categorised as highlighting multiple themes.

Being the most open-ended question in the survey, question 13 generally elicited the longest, most complex responses from people interviewed. A wealth of themes was identified in people's responses. The most common topics people highlighted were:

- the deficiency of permanent housing in the borough
- the excessively long wait times in TA and the fact that these years don't contribute towards allocation
- the lack of outreach, communication, and simple information distribution to residents from RBKC and the housing department.



More housing – 93 responses raised the supply of housing and the need to build/buy/acquire more houses in the borough to fulfil the significantly high demand for housing. Many respondents identified the lack of social housing in RBKC as a key reason for excessively long waiting times in TA and their subsequent stress, depression and pain caused by years waiting and the distance away from their original location.

The reasoning behind the request for more housing feeds into a few of the other themes. For example, more housing would lead to shorter waiting times on the housing register.

Linked to this theme were the 26 comments concerning the speedy use of **empty properties** and voids to increase the number of properties available.

I think this is a good idea to buy properties in RBKC. You have no idea how damaging is to move with your children extremely far and you cannot find a school. This is damaging people and the young generation. And what we all want, is to have healthy people, healthy communities and a strong nation.

Shorter wait times needed – 90 people responded, saying that RBKC needs to focus their attention towards cutting down the excessively long wait times and to alter the allocation scheme so that the length of time applicants have spent waiting in TA is accounted for when dictating their priority in bidding for a permanent property.

A large number of people have been waiting over five years and some waiting over 10, 15 and even 18 years. The demand that the number of years waiting in TA be considered to contribute towards priority on the allocation scheme is one that seems well within reason to many respondents interviewed. Notably, nearly all of those people who highlighted this theme in their response also highlighted that one of the simplest and most straightforward ways to fix this issue of excessive wait times would be for RBKC to have more social housing in the borough.

Lastly, of these 90 people that complained about the excessive waiting times in TA on RBKC's register, 33 noted that the length of time and the condition of the TA they've been placed in has, and does, have a significantly negative impact on their mental health and the mental health of their children/family.

They should purchase more 3-4 bed properties. Points should go up each year for homelessness. I have been waiting 16 years.

Better communication/information from RBKC – 65 responses indicated that RBKC needs to dramatically improve both the quality and consistency of their communication and outreach. Better quality and higher quantity of support and information dissemination to registered applicants on policies, schemes and residents' living situations are highly desired by people and were the third most reoccurring theme. They asked that RBKC better update residents on their situation, expected wait times, offer greater outreach support and most notably were honest with them about priorities, properties and time scales. This was vital to significantly improve residents' experience of going through RBKC's housing allocation scheme alone. The resolution to this criticism is comparatively inexpensive.

Transparency of system – 61 people expressed that RBKC needs to greatly increase the transparency of its allocation scheme and bidding system. This is related to the better communication theme and the desire of respondents to receive clear explanations. Many people reported that they continually were moving up and down the bidding system and they didn't know why this was the case as it was not adequately explained. Moreover, a large majority of these same people also stated that they didn't understand how people they knew had received permanent housing before them with fewer points and who hadn't been waiting as long. They felt the system was a bit of a lottery and luck was needed rather than it being administered in a fair and systematic way. Examples are given of being told different things by different staff. Of being mistreated/ lied to/ hung up on or told child-like excuses.

More support and care from Council is needed. More care when dealing with cases- e.g., misplaced documents - after suppling years of documents - they were lost by Council.

However bad the housing stock situation, housing demand, overcrowding or property maintenance may be in RBKC, if the Council were to have an honest and mature dialogue with applicants that treated them fairly with all the necessary and known relevant information on timescales and property availability, then applicants could reasonably and respectively plan their next 5/10/15 years for their children and themselves.

More larger properties needed – 48 people expressed that RBKC needs to focus on not just building/acquiring more houses but building/acquiring more larger houses. These respondents were aware that the spread of housing stock in RBKC greatly favours smaller properties like studios and one-beds. However, there are a significantly high number of households that require three-bed, four-bed and larger properties for permanent residency in RBKC. It was reported that larger families, primarily in existing social housing, are having to put up with living in properties too small for them.

Revise the priority system – 48 people said the entire allocation scheme/priority points system needs reworking. Respondents stating this did so for a number of reasons, including:

- Those who felt continually confused and cheated by the system having spent years and years waiting in TA and bidding on properties only to see friends and people they know get permanent housing before them to people who didn't express exactly why they thought so but just that because nothing seemed to work about it, the entire system should be reviewed and re-done.
- People working over the 16-hour threshold should receive additional points.
- Some people cheat and trick the system by manipulating it.
- Length of time waiting, ties to the Borough, places of work and children's education, volunteering/community involvement are not being considered properly.

Revise the point system to reflect situations fairly. Treat people on case by case basis and offer proper support. If they can't change things at least mentally support people.

Stop uprooting households – 36 responses expressed the pain and hardship brought about by uprooting households who have long-term connections with the borough, such as jobs, friends, family, children's education, community support, health dependencies, special care dependencies, relationships, volunteering and more. They asked that RBKC considers all these aspects of applicants' lives before they place them in TA in distant London Boroughs or out of London. These placements can make travel for work and to children's schools a nightmare of extremely lengthy and costly or simply impossible journeys, so households have to completely restart their lives and every aspect of it. Added to this, they also had no idea when they would be uprooted again from this TA and into other TA in another area.

Therefore, they stated their mental health is constantly on the edge as they have no security of tenure, no permanent home and are restricted by the conditions that some TA brings with it (no pets, decorating, visitors, etc.) without any idea when they will be told they have seven days to pack and leave before either going to another TA or more unlikely, their permanent house.

It doesn't make sense to uproot families out of their local connection for however long into temporary accommodation elsewhere against their will because this is a major destruction of minds, growth and development, especially for children above age three up to teenagers.

Poor outcomes caused by TA – 33 responses honed in on the poor outcomes for people in TA and said that the consequences of living in their TA had or was greatly impacting their mental health. Of these 33 people, we had respondents who had attempted suicide, were diagnosed as depressed and who were currently suicidal – some of whom expressed this directly to our fieldworkers.

Temporary accommodation isolates you completely from your support system, there is a lack of information, especially about the system of bidding, they made me think I will be there for two years.

These respondents were in such ways due to the excessive strain and emotional stress of supporting themselves and their children in a new area without any friends or family to support them, help with childcare or mental health or socialise with. In a place, they'd never been, didn't know and didn't want to live in. The pandemic has only made this worse.

Of the 33 responses, 27 explicitly discussed how being moved into TA far away from RBKC has significant impacts on their children’s mental health, behaviour, social life, education and overall well-being and development. This, in turn, has a knock-on impact for the parent and a number of parents reported losing their job because the commute is now impossible in time and cost without family or friends or look after the children or because it is simply far too distant to travel to. Additionally, and again similar to theme 8, respondents here expressed the direct impact on their mental health and overall quality of life being in TA has. It demands their constant attention, money and time to ensure their children are happy and financially they can cope while bidding to try and acquire permanent housing.

Overcrowding – 21 people stated that overcrowding needs far more attention as it places incredible strain on families both in social housing and in TA.

More attention should be paid to overcrowding - there are nine people living in two-bedroom flat and they have been waiting since 2005 to be moved.

Mental health and welfare support – 18 people suggested that RBKC needs to offer mental health/general welfare support.

Lower or cap rents – 13 people asked that rents be lowered or capped in social housing.

Improve poor housing conditions – 12 people highlighted that the conditions of some of RBKC’s social housing and TA were very poor. Respondents talked of black mould across multiple walls and sent in picture evidence to our email account to prove so. Furthermore, people sent photos of rats, doors that didn’t close or lock and windows that let no light in, or rooms that couldn’t fit a single bed in that were deemed ‘fit for a children’s bedroom’.

There needs to be more investment and maintenance of Council property and private property that Council sublets. There is no check up on condition of property, a lot of it hasn’t been renovated since 1980s - if you don’t maintain property, it completely deteriorates. The investment they get from selling property should be re-invested into housing and it is not.

7. Case Studies:

Traditionally case studies are used to provide an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a particular situation or process. In these case studies, we carried out interviews with individuals from two different sets of circumstances.

The first set is with fourteen people who are still within the Housing Allocations Scheme processes, waiting for a permanent new home. These were people that we made contact with via the Zoom meetings or the telephone interview process who were willing to be interviewed for the case studies. A few were also referred from local voluntary organisations. They are largely people in TA but also include people in Council and Housing Association property or supported housing that need to be moved to a larger or more accessible property.

The second set of six was with people who the housing department provided contact details for after checking they would be willing to be interviewed. Five of the six had relatively recently moved into a new permanent home. These six provide a different dynamic which, together with the first fourteen, provide a fuller picture of the allocations process.

Our aim with the case studies was to get a more in-depth look at different situations. To put a human face to the situation and examine how the operationalisation of the Housing Allocations Scheme impacts people's lives and circumstances.

The full case studies are attached in appendix B – Set 1 with a yellow background, Set 2 with a grey background. People's names have been changed to give them anonymity.

Set 1

Many of the people in Set 1 are in TA. Their entries onto the housing register are for various reasons, including domestic violence and family breakdown, family expansion, death of a close relative and deteriorating health.

A few of the families placed in TA report being in pleasant accommodation and wanting to stay there. Others report damp, mould and even rats and are desperate to move to something better. It is clear that a number of people are living in very substandard private sector and public sector properties. The pandemic has exacerbated this.

Most people in TA are housed out of RBKC. Some are desperate to get back to RBKC as all their support networks are there. Others build new lives in the new area, their children go to school there and have their friends there and they would rather stay than return to RBKC.

A unifying theme is the lack of help, support or empathy from housing officers, together with maladministration (loss of documents, loss of evidence of calls and conversations) and misrepresentation of timescales people will have to wait.

Even if the wait will be long, you can mentally come to terms with it, prepare and plan your life. It is the lack of transparency and certainty that creates problems and distrust - sometimes it feels that what I am being told is all lies.

A synopsis of the 14 case studies in Set 1 is given below.

1. **Aria** Aria's story is of a family of five in temporary three-bed properties in and out of the borough for 16 years. They lived with the constant fear of being relocated and/or moved at short notice. Moving schools and GP surgeries have been very traumatic and stressful as mother and brother are unwell. The system requires them to have a four-bedroom and prevents them from bidding on three beds which might suit them better. They reported terrible communication and a lack of transparency about how the system works. For one move, the Council continually dismissed the eviction notices they were receiving until, with only three days' notice, the family was moved into a tiny, freezing flat. Also, they were not given 50 points for working. Aria said, "It is hard to say how to improve a system that is hidden and a mystery to those whose lives it decides. People shouldn't be in TA for years. The insecurity of tenure is the hugest stress you can put on lives - it dictates them, it ruins them.... the mental aspect for me and all my siblings suffered greatly over those teenage school years."

In the end, we were given three days' notice and were moved into an uninhabitable room by the Town Hall for nearly six months. How do you pack up your life and move in three days?"

2. **Anie** is a young disabled woman who was moved into supported housing for young disabled people on the understanding that it would be for two years and then left there for ten years. The unit is for learning disabled young people and she is the only person there who has a physical disability. It took a lawyer from Action Disability to get her awarded the points she is entitled to. She is still waiting to be given a permanent home. Anie felt that people don't like speaking to you if you're in supported housing and would rather speak to your support worker and because she is in accommodation for people with learning difficulties, people's attitudes are even worse.

"I was gaslighted left to deteriorate in this small room.... I would like to know why the Council housing department thinks it is right for me to languish in this unsuitable accommodation, year after year."

3. **Daws** is a 48-year-old who has lived in RBKC since 1992. He has a wife and three children. The family has been in TA since 2013. He bids weekly but is never successful. The children's room is too small for three beds, so the youngest sleeps with their parents. They only have 100 points. Daws said, "I am 48 and I need to stay in permanent accommodation. My situation is not stable and creates conflicts. Too much frustration, not stable, not working, the children are stressed and worried." He reported that the housing officer said he couldn't get anything with only 100 points, so he has little hope.

4. **Iyah's** family have lived in the same Council property for 36 years. In 2011, her mother became ill with Parkinson's Disease and is now completely housebound in their fourth-floor flat, being very ill both physically and mentally. They have been trying to be rehoused for ten years. The Council provides no lifting and handling equipment. The fire brigade has written to the Council to say they need to be moved as they would not be able to reach her mother in the event of a fire, but they are still waiting. Iyah reported that a housing officer told her that there is a system in this borough of making deals. She has no faith in the system or the housing officers. She commented that people should not work for people-based services if they don't like people.

If you hate people so much, don't try to provide services to people.

5. **Meena** lives in a housing association studio with three children under five. The studio is very damp and way too small. Her four-year-old sleeps on the floor. The walls have mould and the damp is so extreme that the ceiling coving fell down on her daughter's bed. She is repeatedly told to simply keep bidding. Their asthma and eczema, aggravated by damp and mould, are not taken into consideration. She says, "You would die before you got rehoused."

6. **Cho** was placed in TA in Essex in 2017, where she feels unwelcome due to her race. She is very isolated and feels unsafe. She is frightened and lonely and suffering from depression and anxiety. She has been bidding since 2019 and wants to move back to London with her daughter, where she has family and friends. Travelling back to London is too costly to do often.

7. **Sia** became homeless in 2012 with two children and was given TA. She was moved three

People lie to you all the time, it's like theatre.

times in ten years, always outside the Borough. She feels that the Council was deliberately unhelpful. They never told her she could refuse to leave the Borough, even though her son did not get a school place close to their new TA and she had to travel back to RBKC with him every day. The constant threat of having to move has caused her mental health problems and prompted anti-social behaviour in the children. She felt that it seemed impossible to get answers from the Council and she received no help. She lost her job when she was moved out of RBKC to Essex as she couldn't get her children into a local school and so had to travel back to the old school, which took hours every day. She said all the properties she was offered were in a filthy state.

Our family's mental health has been damaged.... Always living in bad conditions – the children growing up are already angry with the world. My daughter has asthma from poor living conditions - especially affected by the mould. You can't be productive when you don't have a safe place to live.

8. **Ori** was made homeless very suddenly with her husband and special needs son. RBKC took five days to house them and they had to hire a van to move their furniture and also to sleep in the van. They were then housed in a good two-bed property. She has a long journey by bus to her son's school there and back every day as he won't go on trains. She was very surprised at the Zoom meeting to hear how badly others were being treated and for how long. She has many suggestions for improvements as she has spent a lot of time helping other applicants with their paperwork.

9. **Etta** has been in TA since 2017. She is a nurse with three children who lost her home when her marriage broke down. Her children have suffered because of the awful places they

Be proud and don't give in to the pre-formed conceptions of those on the registers, the idea that they are all 'bad' 'criminals' and 'deserve it'.even RBKC housing workers treat you the way general society looks/treats those on the housing register.

have been housed in and the situations they have been in have made her suicidal in the past. At one point, to make them move in three days, an agency hired by RBKC used a sledgehammer to break open the door of her temporary property and evicted her children and their possessions from the property while she was out. Her children were shocked and terrified and they are scarred by the experience. She is desperate to do well by her children and work her way out of their situation, but she feels the system is biased against anyone in social housing and she feels discriminated against. She believes RBKC look down on people on the housing register and deliberately do not help them.

10. **Ma** nursed her mother for years, losing her job in the process and when her mother died, she struggled with grief. Her mother's dog is her last link with her mother and she can't imagine living without it. She is on universal credit and in TA and is about to be evicted by her private landlord. She is threatening to kill herself if she is evicted with nowhere to go with her dog. She also has major health issues. "The bailiffs will take me within two weeks. I am so fearful. I said to myself once they come, I will kill myself."

11. **Tina** is a single mother with four children who joined the register in 2018 when her marriage ended. She is now located outside the borough and at the time was told that if she refused the property, she would be making herself intentionally homeless and she would not be offered another property. It takes one and a half hours each way for her to get to work and her children to get to school. They have to get up at 5.30 am in order to get to school and to her workplace on time. She has been a carer in RBKC for eight years. Her children are unhappy as they are far from family, friends and the support they need. They do not feel safe where they are living. Her travel costs are very high. She lived for 17 years in RBKC, her children of 15, 12, 9 and 5 were all born there and her extended family lives there. She has in the past had suicidal thoughts. She had some support from a social worker but didn't feel she had any from the housing services.

12. **Odet** was a midwife working at an RBKC hospital. She was born in RBKC and has lived all her life there, but when she was made homeless because of domestic violence, she and her child (who was at school in the borough) were placed outside the borough. She had felt like the borough forgot about her as soon as she was moved out. This caused her a lot of stress and she had to fight for a year to be noticed and moved back to the borough.

I wrote to my RBKC MP, who has 'represented' me my whole live in RBKC and they told me that I wasn't eligible for help as I was in Bethnal Green, I was Bethnal Green's problem. I wrote to the local MP for Bethnal Green, they told me I was placed here from RBKC, so I was RBKC's responsibility.

13. **Mo** has been in TA for 14 years. He has spent all that time outside the borough and his family of four children are now happily settled in Essex and do not want to return to RBKC. Unlike people in some of the other case studies, Mo is afraid he will be made to return. During the 14 years, he has been moved twice and sometimes that presented problems with getting the children to school. He commented that he had not seen four-bed properties on the system to bid for.

14. **Cleo** has been in TA since 2013. When she became eligible for a three-bedroom property, it took two months of pushing to get the Council to update the system. She claims the

I've been on the register for eight years but still cannot successfully bid on properties.

system is unfair and there is no incentive to work more than 16 hours a week. She works 30 hours a week and suggests that having a job in the borough should translate into points and that those in employment in the borough should be prioritised above unemployed people. She is surprised that what a person contributes to the borough is not taken into consideration and upset that the length of time, personal ties and what a person contributes to the community and gives back to the borough are not properly recognised.

Set 2

This set of six case studies are largely with people who have moved into new homes recently. All six were contacted by housing services to check they would be willing to be interviewed.

They are from a number of different circumstances, including two young people who had been homeless, one Grenfell survivor, and two downsizers from large family properties after the death of a parent. These five moved into new homes relatively recently. The sixth is of a woman with medical needs who is still waiting to be rehoused.

Only one of the people is happy with the process and the treatment they received from housing officers. A further two praise support workers from other teams or organisations that helped them.

A synopsis of their stories is below.

Em was a young homeless woman with mental health issues. She had initially been placed in a hostel and in a B&B, both of which made her anxiety worse. She was also temporarily in a refuge due to a violent partner. She was helped by a support worker to navigate the system and said that she could not have managed without that support. The Council had initially decided she was intentionally homeless when she left the hostel to stay with a friend but eventually were helpful in agreeing to reinstate her points to the date she entered the hostel. It was a long journey but successful in the end, and she is now in a studio flat.

I would advise anyone with emotional or medical needs to ensure they have individual support or evidence to support their case.

She said there was no one at the Council to help point someone needing support in the right direction.

Ed was a young man who had difficulty getting help when he found himself homeless until he received support from an organisation called Insight. Without the support worker, he thinks he could not have been able to navigate the system. After six months in a hostel, where he got support to find a job, he was able to move to another secure hostel for people in work and, with 150 points, was able to bid for studio flats. He was successful in the process and is now very happy but felt it was more through help from third parties than staff in the Council. He thinks there is an urgent need for more youth workers and for help with security for young people.

He would advise people to stay calm, positive and busy. If staying in a hostel, he advised ignoring the other residents and focusing on learning to be independent. He advised anyone going to the Town Hall to take someone with them. He felt he was taken much more seriously when he had his key worker with him. He found it hard to concentrate and remember to ask certain questions and having someone listening with him really helped.

Ly had given up her own flat to move back in with her parents in their four-bed property as her mother was ill and needed care. After her mother died and her father moved out into a flat nearby, it was just her and her baby in the family home she had grown up in. She felt huge pressure from the Council to move out. She was also offered a cash incentive.

After a few months, she moved into a two-bed flat not too far from her father. However, she had felt pressurised and rushed and did not feel that the Council took into consideration that she was a young mother and was grieving for her own mother. So, although her new flat is OK and she was able to stay in the area she grew up in, she felt the process was hurtful and lacked empathy.

Al survived the fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 and was hospitalised for two days. His brother, whom he shared a flat with in the tower, died in the tragedy. The Council placed him and his family in a hotel for a year. He was offered a flat in Kensington that initially seemed nice, but it had maintenance problems and leaking pipes.

He felt that communication with the Council was very poor and promises were not kept. He said, "It was impossible to find someone who could or would take a decision."

The poor communication from the housing services was the worst thing about the process. It was impossible to get a straight and honest answer from anyone.

Lin had to move into a smaller property when his father died. He resisted pressure to move quickly. He felt the housing team was generally helpful and his tenant management association gave him help and support. As he resisted pressure to move quickly, he was offered a flat he is very happy with. His experience of the service was generally positive.

Isi began the process to join the housing register after cancer treatment left her in a coma in hospital. When she partially recovered, she needed somewhere secure for her and her dog to live out their days. To join the register, she had to prove how unwell she is – and her paperwork was repeatedly lost by the Council. She was not sent properties to bid on for two years and hasn't yet seen one that could work for her. The Council is pushing her to go into sheltered housing, but they don't allow dogs there and she feels she cannot live without her dog.

The housing staff I spoke to when I first registered were extremely friendly and pleasant, but the truth is that nothing has come of it...My mental health has suffered due to the uncertainty and the very long wait.

8. Summary and themes:

Background and processes

The section on background and processes largely explains the brief and methodology of our work. The early resident engagement took place between January and March 2021, conducted during a Covid lockdown, and comprised:

- Telephone conversations with tenants representatives and relevant local voluntary organisations to discuss the proposed processes.
- Development of and work with a CAG of tenants, residents, people on the Housing Register and representatives from the voluntary organisation that provides support for people on housing issues to shape the engagement exercise and report.
- Six public Zoom meetings.
- An online survey.
- Surveys, conversations and case studies conducted via the telephone.

Prior to this, we recruited three local field workers to work with us on the project. The fourth fieldworker was already an employee. Their four reports are attached in Appendix C and provide a powerful insight into our work.

The background and processes section also provides some key data sets that evidence the delivery of the Housing Allocation Scheme.

Of note:

- The number of people in TA out of borough to be allocated a permanent home is disproportionately low when compared with people in TA within the borough. This needs investigating and explaining.
- A number of data sets do not tally, which may be down to poor data recording or differences in the use of definitions. Better data is necessary to provide accurate and transparent data to the public and this needs attention.

Community Advisory Group

The section on the CAG explains the process for its recruitment and business. Members of the CAG have played a vital role in challenging our work and asking for more information from the Council.

The group met eight times during the course of the work and CAG members will also meet with housing officers to discuss the report's findings once the Council has digested them. They may also be asked to work with the Council after this on co-design input into the new policy.

Zoom meetings

Each of the six public meetings on Zoom differed, but there were several common themes running through them. While many people joined the sessions to provide feedback on the Housing Allocation Scheme, a surprisingly high number joined to try to get help as they said that they didn't know where else to go or hadn't been able to get help elsewhere. This very much proved the need for better communications and support systems.

A lot of people who attended the meetings said they felt that the system was punishing them. Their interactions with the Council had often been frustrating and made things worse for them mentally as they had not felt listened to or treated with respect. Points raised at meetings are organised below under questions, issues and suggestions.

Questions:

- How and why does the bidding system seem so unreliable, and why do I come in at different places every time?
- Why and when are direct offers used?
- How does RBKC decide how and whom to place where for TA?
- Why are people continuously moved around in TA and why is it normally always out of borough?
- Is consideration given to how long an applicant has been waiting on the Housing Register?
- Why can't we decide we only need a smaller flat we can more easily afford?
- How many of the new 300 homes will be accessible?
- Are there other routes to permanent rehousing?
- Are my chances of getting permanent accommodation in RBKC affected by my children attending secondary school in another borough (as RBKC placed us here)?
- Can tenants in TA get financial support to move out?
- Is the Lancaster West estate now ringfencing properties just to residents within Lancaster West? Is a better deal for them a worse one overall for people in TA?
- People put in TA in another borough wanted to know if there was a process for them to stay there as they were now settled with kids in school etc.
- How long should we have to wait in TA?
- Do parents lose their status (when they live in TA) when children get older?
- Why are there so few accessible dwellings?
- Why is it not routine to adapt properties to higher accessibility standards when they become empty?
- Does it affect my points if I don't bid? The housing officers keep telling me to bid, bid, bid and tell me I am doing well if I have bid a lot. Is this necessary to be selected for a property?
- Our building will be refurbished, and we do not know what will happen to us.
- Why are we told to keep bidding on properties even when they are unsuitable?
- Can we visit the property before we accept it when it's a permanent offer?

The Council should answer all these and other questions that arise on a FAQs page on their website – and share this page with all housing support agencies in the borough.

Issues:

- The length of time in TA was seen as a huge issue.
- The lack of representation and voice for people in TA out of borough was also seen as a significant disadvantage. As they are out of borough, they don't have an RBKC councillor. There are tenant associations but not TA associations.
- The perception that the bidding system simply doesn't work – people need to have some idea of when they will be rehoused to plan their lives.
- Need for transparency within the housing waiting list.

- Sometimes good housing officers help to sort things out, but it should not be luck but a standard routine.
- Shortage of properties – especially accessible ones.
- Need for directing to help from other services, e.g., for mental health.
- Damp and mould in properties.
- Getting repairs done in TA during Covid was a big problem – and there seemed confusion on what constitutes emergency work.
- Mould has a huge effect on your health if you have asthma but did not seem to be included in repairs.
- Placements in expensive TA mean that it's harder to make work pay.
- There is a lack of information.
- Bad communication and inadequate liaison with social services are leading to a lot of problems.
- Staff need more training and support.
- Some people think staff take bribes.
- More needs to be done on language barriers as when someone does not understand the system, it is harder.
- The Council needs to take special needs issues like sensitivity to noise seriously.

Many of these issues would be addressed with better and more timely information and a review of the bidding system and information on bidding, so it is more transparent and better understood.

Suggestions:

- Provide better information and greater transparency and clarity on how the system works.
- For properties you bid for, the Council needs to provide full postcode and details of the inside and outside of the flat before people bid on it. Also, energy labels.
- Improve and train customer service officers. Housing officers need to treat tenants and people in TA with respect and dignity.
- Put a rent cap/threshold on so people can afford it if they work full-time.
- Provide a better time frame for moving into permanent accommodation.
- Improve the complaints process.
- Improve the quality of when dealing with property stock.
- There should be additional points for working 25+, 30+, 35+ hours a week as it's a lot more than just 16. Many people hit that target then stop.
- Waiting three years, five years, seven years etc., should be awarded additional points when such milestones are reached.

These suggestions from people at Zoom meetings need to be reviewed. The ones that are echoed in the survey responses and case studies are picked up in the report's recommendations.

The survey

The survey was far more formulaic than the Zoom meetings. There were 13 set questions about different aspects of the Housing Allocation Scheme, though question 13 was a totally open question.

We received 262 responses to the survey, 166 online, 94 by telephone and two by mail.

The survey posed 13 questions about the workings of different elements of the Housing Allocations Scheme.

Question 1 asked if the existing points allocated within the Housing Allocations Scheme were appropriate. Respondents considered that six of the criteria had the right number of points and nine should have more. These are detailed in the table below. Consideration should be given to increasing points for these criteria.

	Exceptional priority	Emergency health and independence	At serious risk of harm	Supporting health and independence	Redevelopment of homes	Vacating homes	Supporting adoption and fostering	Overcrowded Families	Contractual duties	Move-on priority	Homeless duty	Homeless	Locality hardship	Armed Forces	Paid work
About right	153	149	118	87	112	103	126	69	130	100	57	83	88	103	97
Higher	50	73	98	125	96	106	68	149	56	121	170	134	127	118	124
Lower	46	34	36	35	42	39	52	27	56	24	21	24	26	21	26

Question 2 asked: **Should new criteria be added to the system?**

Most people thought new criteria should be added. The issues raised most frequently were:

- Waiting times: more points should be awarded for waiting longer on the Housing Register.
- Overcrowding: additional variations to the overcrowding category should be made.
- Working and support: more points for carers, for other key workers, for people working full time and/or for people doing voluntary work and for working single parents.
- Disability: specific issues for people with disabilities, e.g., total dependence, children’s disabilities, situations where the fire brigade had said they would not be able to rescue the person in the event of a fire.
- Hidden problems: including mental health issues and special education needs. Both needs are complex and require additional support and help.
- Local support needs: community networks, care and support needs people had where they were living. Children’s educational needs were mentioned a number of times.
- Community: for those with the longest ties to the borough and few or no ties elsewhere.

Question 3 asked: **Should RBKC keep the points-based system or move to a simpler banding system?**

Ninety-seven people showed a preference for keeping the system and 74 suggested changing it. The issues raised most frequently, included the following:

- Need for a less complex system that is more transparent and easier to understand.
- Tailored to individual circumstances – whatever the scheme was, it should fully consider people’s individual needs and circumstances.

- Length of waiting time – whichever system is used, the length of time you have been on the register should be taken into consideration.
- Review aspects of the points system, such as being more transparent and adding sub-bands.
- Need for more information about the banding system to enable understanding.

Question 4 asked: **Should we have special rehousing pathways for certain groups that have faced extra difficulties?**

Of the responses, 183 people thought there should be special pathways (thirty-six thought there shouldn't), but there was little agreement on who they should be for. The most frequent suggestions were:

- Specific foci, but great variation in what these should be – the most frequent were people with a disability, those too long in TA, those with learning difficulties, care leavers, people with mental health issues and street homeless.
- Special needs and circumstances – have a special team dealing with people to support and help them with a personal approach.
- Management of system – staff need more training and supervision to work with people on the housing register, especially those who are traumatised and/or have complex needs.

Question 5 asked: **How do you think homeless prevention should be better supported through the Scheme?**

The most frequent responses to this were:

- Additional Housing: build or buy additional units and take control of empty and derelict buildings.
- Support schemes: work support schemes, more support for mental health and social care and for those in TA.
- Shelters: an increase in the number of, and funding for, shelters and hostel-type accommodation for street homeless people.

Question 6 asked: **How can overcrowded families be better supported through the Scheme?**

The most frequent responses to this question suggested the following:

- Give priority or more points to overcrowded families, so they get rehoused faster.
- Age/sex threshold for sharing a bedroom – siblings aged over ten of different genders should not share and also have separate rooms from 18+ regardless of gender.
- More larger properties – build or buy bigger houses.
- Provide housing in another area with the freedom to decline without penalty.

Question 7 asked: **Should RBKC operate a closed register?**

RBKC currently operates a closed register and residents must have lived in the borough for a minimum of three years before they can apply to the Housing Register. One hundred forty-two people thought it should remain closed, with only 21 saying it shouldn't.

The main theme that rose from this question was the number of years required for a connection. Twenty-two people thought it should be more than three years and 15 people thought it should be less. Seven others suggested points for the longer you have had connections to the borough.

The second-largest theme for comment was about having some flexibility for people in hardship, such as those needing to flee domestic violence.

Question 8 asked: **Should eligibility criteria be changed or added to?**

Eighty-eight people said they didn't think the eligibility criteria for joining RBKC's housing register should change, 39 people said it should and 58 were not sure.

No themes came out of this question with significant support, but the most common concerned extending the number of years before acceptance onto the scheme.

Question 9 asked: **Should disqualification criteria be changed or added to?**

Currently, people will be disqualified for a number of reasons, such as lying on their application or paying money/bribing to obtain a tenancy.

Of the responses, 107 people said they shouldn't be changed, 91 said they should and 30 don't know.

The majority of more detailed responses suggest that the main priority for tenants is that tenancies should be applied for and awarded fairly, that officers should try harder to understand their applicants, but that swifter, more decisive action was needed to deter anti-social behaviours. The main responses covered the following themes:

- The disqualification criteria are right.
- Need greater flexibility – e.g., where convictions were out of time/spent, or that second chances might be appropriate where people had mental health needs.
- Clearer guidance on what constituted 'deliberate'; e.g., that an individual's circumstances needed to be taken into account.
- Additional criteria when evidence of clear illegal activity/no known legal sources of income; or for aggressive bullying behaviour towards neighbours.

Question 10 asked: **What should be the balance between choice-based lettings and direct offers?**

Of the 167 quantifiable answers, 65 people said there should be a mix of choice-based and direct offers, 64 people said it should all be choice-based, 21 said there should only be direct offers and 17 said they didn't know.

The main issues that were raised are the following:

- More choices should be allowed before people were deemed intentionally homeless.
- There needs to be more choice of accessible homes.
- The lack of information generally to help people understand the bidding system and also about on properties to bid for – need photos and room sizes and postcode before people were expected to bid.

Question 11 asked: **Are there better ways to promote Housing Options such as the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme, HomeStart Scheme, Mobility Transfer Scheme.**

A resounding 161 people said yes, 23 said no and 33 said they didn't know.

Awareness of these options was low. There was general enthusiasm for such options as a way of providing people with options and creating more vacancies in RBKC but concerns around situations such as whether hard-won services such as care packages would transfer.

The most frequent suggestions to promote the options were:

- Promote more strongly, even as 'banner' advertising on the website, i.e., so that applicants should be encouraged to consider these schemes first.
- Targeted promotions should use phone, emails, and via common social media groups (such as Facebook locality groups); but that there should also be posters and leaflets in civic centres and GP surgeries.
- Add other options, e.g., applicants should be allowed to apply direct for stock in other housing authority areas across the country.

Question 12 asked: **Should there be a separate waiting list for intermediate housing routes?**

One hundred fifty-three people said yes to this, 42 said no and 31 said they didn't know. A significant proportion of yes answers were conditional upon certain factors and themes, including:

- Guaranteeing safety and security of tenure.
- Being transparent and clear to residents with the list's criteria beforehand.
- Ensuring that attention and maintenance to the existing housing register doesn't decrease the level of service.

Question 13 asked: **Do you have any further comments or observations on what RBKC should do?**

One hundred thirty-three had further comments and most of these comments were multifaceted. The most common topics people highlighted were:

- The deficiency of social housing in the borough.
- The excessively long wait times in TA and the fact that these years don't contribute towards allocation.
- The lack of outreach, communication, and simple information distribution to residents from RBKC and the housing department.
- The need to greatly increase the transparency of its allocation scheme and bidding system.
- More larger properties needed.
- Revise the priority system to include waiting times, hours worked, key workers and community activity.
- Problems caused by living in TA and being uprooted from support networks.
- Overcrowding places incredible strains on families.
- The need for more mental health and welfare support.

Summary

From answers to these 13 questions, a number of themes are raised again and again. These are largely but not wholly reflected in the answers to question 13. In terms of issues and recommendations, the following need to be reviewed by the Council:

- 1) The need to pay attention to the length of time people are in TA or are chronically overcrowded. Points need awarding for length of time on the Register.
- 2) The need not just for more housing but for prioritising specific types – primarily accessible and larger units. Through this, multipliers can also be created, for example:
 - build more accessible homes allowing downsizing moves for older people in large properties and for people with disabilities. This then frees other units for larger or smaller overcrowded families who leave smaller units for smaller families or single people – maximising numbers of moves and people permanently housed
 - build more three and four-bed properties, once an overcrowded family moves into this from a one or two bed, it again frees their units for smaller families or single people.
- 3) The need for staff with more time and inclination to provide support and advice to people on the Register in a more respectful and bespoke manner.
- 4) Better and more timely information to people on the Register, including regular updates. This should include more information on properties to bid for and the results of the bidding to make the system better understood and more transparent.
- 5) The need for a voice for people on the Register in TA. Possibly a committee or board. This should be set up by December 2021.

The Case Studies

There are 20 case studies divided into two sets. The first is a set of 14 cases of people on the Housing Register and largely in TA. These people volunteered to do case studies from the Zoom meetings, from telephone interviews or were referred by local charities. The second set is of six cases. These are people who the housing department provided contact details for after checking they would be willing to be interviewed. Five of the six had relatively recently moved into a new permanent home. Together the twenty cases provide a fuller picture of the Housing Register and allocations process in action.

Of the first 14, their entries onto the Housing Register are for various reasons, including domestic violence, family breakdown, family expansion, death of a close relative and deteriorating health.

A few of the families placed in TA report being in pleasant accommodation and wanting to stay there. Others report damp and mould and are desperate to move to something better. It is clear that a number of people are living in very substandard private sector and public sector properties and that the pandemic has exacerbated this.

Most people in TA are housed out of RBKC. Some are desperate to get back to RBKC as all their support networks are there. Others have built new lives in the new area, their children go to school there and have their friends there and they would rather stay than return to RBKC.

A unifying theme is the lack of help, support or empathy from housing officers, together with maladministration (loss of documents, loss of evidence of calls and conversations) and misrepresentation of timescales people will have to wait.

The second set of six case studies are largely people who have moved into new homes recently. They are from a number of different circumstances, including two young people who had been homeless, one Grenfell survivor, and two downsizers from large family properties after the death

of a parent. These five moved into new homes relatively recently. The sixth is of a woman with medical needs who is still waiting to be rehoused.

Only one of the people is happy with the process and the treatment they received from housing officers. A further two praise support workers from other teams or organisations that helped them.

Issues arising from the case studies are:

- 1) The need for better information from the Council – people want to know where they stand in terms of future moves and waiting times. They want honesty and regular updates.
- 2) The need for better systems, so information is not lost.
- 3) The need for staff who provide information, advice and guidance with respect and understanding.
- 4) There is a desperate need for more accessible housing. The Council needs to work alongside disabled service users to address this.
- 5) The length of time people are in TA and the impact that has on them and their families need addressing. Better information, advice and guidance and points to reflect length of time on the Register will help a little.
- 6) Help from a support group, advocate or even a TMO can help massively in individuals' interface with the Council.
- 7) The need for a voice for people in TA and a mutual aid forum.
- 8) Review of the bidding system and information about it so it is more honest.

Appendixes

a. Survey questions

The questionnaire for the telephone survey is below. The questions for the online survey were identical.

RBKC Housing Allocations Scheme Telephone Survey

Background

Housing authorities are required by the 1996 Housing Act to have a housing allocation scheme and can only allocate social housing in accordance with that scheme. The scheme must ensure that a priority for rehousing is given to certain categories of people, including homeless households, households living in insanitary, overcrowded and/or unsatisfactory housing conditions, households who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, and households who need to move to a particular locality in order to avoid hardship. It may also prioritise other categories of people for rehousing based on local ('additional') priorities. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Allocations scheme was agreed in 2017 and needs to be renewed in line with its commitment to serving residents in a new way with 'co-design' where possible.

NewmanFrancis are working on behalf of the Council to carry out community engagement with tenants, residents and organisations to obtain opinions on the Housing Allocations Policy. The full Housing Allocations Scheme is at <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/housing/finding-your-home/housing-allocation-scheme-2017>

Interviewee data

Tenants/residents

Name (optional)		Estate/Ward	
Tenant/resident/other	T <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O <input type="checkbox"/>	Postcode	
Have you been through the housing allocation process in the last three years?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Details	
Have you helped or supported anyone through the process in the last three years?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Details	
Cont			

1. Who should be prioritised for social housing in RBKC?

The Council must support certain groups of people, including homeless households. Points are gained by people registering with the Council for housing via the following criteria. Do you think the right number of points are given to each criterion relative to each other? Against each criterion, please give 1 if you think the points should be higher, 2 if you think it should be lower and 3 if you think it is about right.

Criteria	Explanation/examples	Points	Number on register (1)	1 Higher 2 Lower 3 About right
Exceptional priority	Exceptional circumstances where there are no other suitable housing options	2,000	26	
Emergency health and independence	Where daily life is impossible in the current home due to health problems	2,000	9	
At serious risk of harm	Residents at severe risk in their own home. The referral for this can only be made by Social Services or the police.	1,900	25	
Supporting health and independence	Where the current home is significantly unsuitable due to health problems	900	183	
Redevelopment of homes	When estate regeneration takes place and it's not possible to remain in the home through the redevelopment.	900	4	
Vacating homes	Households who, by moving, will make available a property suitable for a disabled person and households moving to a smaller property.	700	182	
Supporting adoption and fostering	Approved foster parents and adopting parents who need different housing to adopt or foster RBKC children.	700	2	
Overcrowding	Families lacking two or more bedrooms in their current home.	200	113	
Contractual duties	Council employees in tied accommodation who are retiring.	200	2	
Move-on priority	Residents in supported housing or care who are assessed as needing social housing as their next step.	100	65	
Homeless duty	Homeless households the Council has a 'full and main' legal duty to rehouse (usually living in TA).	100	2114	
Homeless	Residents who are homeless, but the Council does not have a 'full and main' legal duty to rehouse.	10		
Locality hardship	Points awarded to people who need to move to another area of the borough. Only awarded in exceptional circumstances.	10		
Additional priorities – residents must fall into the above categories in order to qualify for these.				
Armed Forces	For people serving in the regular forces or have done so in the five years preceding their application or bereaved spouses or civil partners or seriously injured, ill or disabled reservists.	50		
Paid work	Where a member of the household is in work and has been in work for at least six months continuously for 16+ hours a week.	50		

2. Should new criteria be added to the system?

Are there new criteria that should be added to the list above? For example, there are no additional points given for extremes of overcrowding.

3. Should RBKC keep the points-based system or move to a simpler banding system?

Many local authorities use a banding system which is simpler to initially understand but can hide inequalities or inconsistencies. Also, many banding systems have 'sub-bands' to take account of differing levels of need and the length of waiting. At present, RBKC uses a points-based system that is more complicated but less open to interpretation.

4. Should we have special rehousing pathways for certain groups that have faced extra difficulties?

e.g., Care leavers, or those suffering domestic abuse, learning difficulties, ex-armed forces, street homeless/chronic homeless etc.

5. How do you think homeless prevention should be better supported through the Scheme?

As the Council can't build sufficient social housing or reduce local rental prices in the borough, what other options do you think are open?

6. How can overcrowded families be supported through the Scheme?

E.g., Age thresholds for sharing bedrooms, bar on 21+, more severely overcrowded, key workers, local connection?

7. Should RBKC operate a closed register?

Many London authorities operate a 'closed register', which means that residents must have lived in the borough for a minimum number of years before being able to apply to the Housing Register. In RBKC, this is three years.

8. Should eligibility criteria be changed or added to?

Currently, people who do not fulfil eligibility criteria, including residency, links to the local area, income and savings, citizenship and having no points on assessment block people from being placed on the housing register. Should other barring criteria be added? (Closed housing registers can under-estimate housing need, but an open register can result in residents with no prospect of rehousing joining the register.)

9. Should disqualification criteria be changed or added to?

Currently, people who have supplied false or misleading information on their application for housing will be disqualified, as will people who:

- paid money to obtain a tenancy
- have been convicted of or had legal action taken against them for violence, racial harassment, threatening behaviour, any other antisocial behaviour, any physical or verbal abuse towards staff
- have deliberately made themselves overcrowded, if they have no other priority for rehousing
- have deliberately moved into a property unsuitable for their disability or long-term health condition
- have deliberately disposed of financial assets and resources

10. What should be the balance be between choice-based lettings and direct offers?

Government guidance still promotes resident choice and choosing a new home is more likely to result in a successful tenancy, but the process doesn't always result in properties being let to those in the highest priority and can result in residents waiting longer to be rehoused (while they wait for an 'ideal' property).

11. Housing Options.

Currently, RBKC has a few alternative housing options such as the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme, HomeStart Scheme, Mobility Transfer Scheme (see <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/housing/finding-your-home/housing-optionsschemes> for details). Are there better ways to promote these options?

12. Intermediate Housing

Some Councils have introduced a separate waiting list for residents that could access intermediate housing routes (homes for purchase and rent provided costing more than Social Rented Housing but less than local market levels such as shared ownership). Should RBKC introduce a separate list?

13. Do you have any further comments or observations on what RBKC should do?

The Housing Strategy talks about a targeted acquisitions programme to purchase larger (3-4 bed) properties for social rent and for us as TA – are there other avenues to be pursued.

b. Case Studies

B1 – Set 1

1. Ari

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

In 2005 her mother applied for help and they were categorised as homeless and given 150 points. Her youngest sibling was one year old at the time. He is now doing his A-levels and they are still in TA. The family have spent 17 years in TA.

During 2005-2008, they were in TA in Wandsworth and then spent ten years (2008-2018) in a flat in RBKC. At the beginning of 2018, they were suddenly forced to leave with virtually no notice due to improper communication from the Council into another property that was unfit for habitation. The Council had reassured her mother that the landlord's eviction letter would be dealt with and ASSURED her that they would give them good warning when they needed to prepare for their move.

In the end, they were given three days' notice and were moved into an uninhabitable room by the town hall for nearly six months. It was tiny, the heating didn't work and neither did the water really and this was in October/November, so they were freezing.

After six months, they were subsequently moved to East Acton (Hammersmith & Fulham). They have been there ever since (2018-2021) but want to be back in the Borough. All of the properties (apart from the brief uninhabitable six months in 2018) have been three-bed properties. Their current property is supposed to be a four-bed as RBKC claims the dining room is a bedroom and it clearly isn't and they have never used it as a bedroom. Therefore, she shares a bedroom with one of her siblings.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

Initially, there was very little help. In 2005, guidance about how houses were allocated or about the bidding system when it was introduced was minimal. A single letter was probably all that was sent. For such a significant change to the system, this seems far below what you would expect. There was no transparency about the new bidding system. It seemed that they changed it completely without the residents' input.

Much later on, she was told that the family could have had an extra 50 points for her working all the time they have been on the register. She only found out because she went to the town hall repeatedly and she is sure that if she hadn't, she would still be none the wiser. Why was this information not made available?

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing?

The bidding system makes it very hard for them to bid on properties. They 'need' four bedrooms but would be more than happy with a three-bed property. The system and the workers at the town hall were unable to comment or do anything at all. It could free up four beds for others who are overcrowded.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

It was very hard for the children, shifting between boroughs and schools, especially during their teenage years. It affected their education, their friendships and their mental health. The MOST brutal part of it has now passed and only her youngest brother (A-level age) is still at school and finishing remotely. The family's mental health suffered greatly.

Her job, her brothers' school and her mother's GPs, hospitals and care are all in west London. Another move would be immensely distressing for the family, as it has happened multiple times before. It is very disruptive and traumatic to be uprooted from the surroundings you are comfortable with. It caused her Mum unspeakable distress when she was suddenly ripped away. The way they were moved when their landlord wanted to sell the flat was unbelievable.

Nobody should be constantly on edge about being uprooted, especially when family members need medical support. The constant worry really affects you.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

Barely anyone from the Council or housing department was supportive. She occasionally met lovely people at the town hall who were understanding and listened and helped while being empathetic. But just as many were the complete opposite. She found most of the information she needed herself or by taking time off work in order to repeatedly and actively enquire at the town hall.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

A few people at the town hall were immensely helpful and empathetic. She greatly appreciated certain individuals who have been supportive. Unfortunately, many have been quite obstructive.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

The absolute lack of communications and expectations set. Huge uncertainty creates such a terrible feeling of the unknown. It makes everything so temporary. How do you pack up your life and move in three days? The anxiety that is caused by the uncertainty is the worst part entirely.

Being ripped out of their RBKC flat and moved to East Acton with no regard to their humanity. The Council appeared completely oblivious until it was the day they had to move and then they said, okay, you have three days and you're moving into this tiny uninhabitable property without heating in November. Sorry, we didn't mention any of this while you spent the last near year repeatedly coming and highlighting this to our attention and asking for help, guidance, and reassurance.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was surprised at the length of time of the process – 17 years.

The biggest surprise was how nonchalantly the workers at town hall behaved when she told them that they had received eviction notices. She had to take several days off work to try to sort it out properly. Her mum also went down a few times to try and sort it. It is shocking and surprising that the Council did not take them seriously.

She was surprised at the appalling state of the accommodation they were moved into for six months. It was not habitable. They also had two gas leaks and were literally freezing there.

What advice would you give to others?

She advises others to actively chase the Council and the town hall and the housing department. That was the only way they gathered information. It is absolutely disgraceful that you have to press and press to find out basic information that they should openly give you.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

There needs to be more transparency, as there is none. If information was actively shared on the system, its workings and the plans and actions of the Council, then people would be better informed to advise how to improve it. It's hard to say how to improve a system that is hidden and a mystery to those whose lives it decides.

Whatever they do change, they need to communicate completely openly, actively and with transparency about everything. Then everyone can manage expectations, plan their lives and understand why things may and may not happen. People should not have to hunt down this information.

Finally, people should not be in TA. The insecurity of tenure is the hugest stress you can put on lives – it dictates them, it ruins them.

2. Anie

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She joined the housing register in 2008, aged 18. The medical condition she had had since childhood had worsened and she could no longer manage the stairs at her mother's home. Her support worker reassured her that a property would be offered to her once she had been on the housing register for five years.

In 2011, after three years of waiting and aged 21, she was advised by her social worker to accept a room in supported housing for young disabled people so that she could gain the skills she needed in order to live independently. It would be a stepping stone to independence and after two years, she would have the necessary five years on the register.

To her dismay, the Housing team congratulated her on her move and removed her from the register. She fought to re-join the register but discovered that she had lost the three years she had previously accumulated.

She also discovered that she was the only physically disabled young person there and that the others all had learning difficulties, such as autism.

Her room is small and inadequate. There is no space for the equipment she needs, she cannot shower safely, cannot eat or study in any comfort and when she needs carers overnight, they have to sleep on the floor. She qualified for an electric wheelchair years ago, but there's no space for a walker, let alone a wheelchair, so she can't have one.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

She has complained many times over the years, but no one from the Council has ever acknowledged her complaints. On four occasions, the Council lost the medical forms she was required to submit. They refused to accept a letter from her GP and insisted that she obtain letters from the Professors that treat her complex condition. When she provided proof of her condition, they lost the documents or claimed they had not received them. She eventually had to go to the Town Hall in person and have the documents stamped. Even then, they claimed not to have them, although when she showed them a copy of the stamp, they acknowledged receipt.

She suspects that the Council prioritises male applicants. Young women are expected to marry and no longer be a problem for them. She is certain it would be easier for her to be rehoused if she had a child.

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing/on the housing register?

Her health has deteriorated during the ten years she has spent in the supported housing.

She was incorrectly moved to the Learning Disabilities team upon admission there and she had to fight to be moved back to the Transition team for 18-25-year-olds, which she managed in 2013.

After the Grenfell tragedy in 2016, things started to change. The fire safety "Stay Put" policy was abandoned and staff pushed her to sign a document stating that in the event of a fire, she would exit via the stairs, which was impossible. She was extremely ill at the time but managed to resist the pressure.

In 2019, she received help from a lawyer from Action Disability, who successfully fought the Council on her behalf and she now finally has the 1000 points she should always have been entitled to.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

Her room is so small (max two visitors) that she cannot see her family of six together and she has been physically distanced from family and friends. Staff imposed a 9 pm curfew which meant seeing family was difficult as they work all day. Staff also tried to prevent her boyfriend from being allowed to stay the night.

She has felt unmotivated and depressed. There is no space for a desk and she has to balance a laptop on her knees in order to study, which is painful for her.

The poor facilities have been wearing – she cannot fit a walker in the room, and she has had to position chairs

around the room for her to collapse upon when she faints so that she doesn't knock herself out. She has been given a special recliner chair to help her back pain, but there is no room to recline it in, so it is pointless.

She has to sit on the toilet in order to shower. She feels she has lost her twenties because of being stuck there.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

She has received NO support from the Council. Over the years, she has received help from support workers, social services and especially from Action Disability.

Most of her support has come from her family, but she found it painful to have to ask family to come and care for her when she knew how hard they worked. It hurt to see her mother sleeping on the floor of her room beside the oven.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

The best thing about the process was being able to stay in the area where she grew up and being close to her family, friends and doctors. She loves being able to look out of the window and see a familiar environment.

She has also learnt how to be live independently and has made close friends and not been lonely.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

Not having an accessible flat has been awful. The other awful thing was having to speak to the Council. The Council staff do not explain or help. She has no contact and no relationship with anyone at the Council, and no caseworker. She has also felt racism from them, despite having lived in the borough her entire life.

"I feel like a beggar when I speak to the Council, like I have to beg."

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was surprised that social services and housing did not work together and feels they should have a working relationship. Her support worker had no influence with housing – it took a lawyer from a support service to make them listen.

What advice would you give to others?

She advised others to buy a notebook and record every single conversation, email or phone call with housing, with the date and notes on what was discussed. Otherwise, it would be almost impossible to recall details in chronological order, especially with a process that almost inevitably drags on for many years.

She also advised others not to think that they can navigate the system without help and to seek assistance from charities and other organisations as early as possible. "You need back up!"

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The Council should give everyone applying for housing a booklet explaining the system. The Council should employ someone disabled and involve them in the conversation.

Caseworkers should be assigned for those in the most need. She feels she received the least support despite her disabilities. "I am hiding in plain sight."

3. Daws

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

His previous privately rented accommodation was too small and overcrowded and the rent was too high. In 2013, he had to go through the homeless application process. The Council offered him TA and he was not given the option of refusing it. He has been on the register since 1992 and bidding since 2013 while waiting for a permanent place. Nothing new has happened since.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

He has given no options and has received no support. He has been told to wait and bid, which he has been doing every week since 2013.

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing?

In 2013 he moved into his first TA in Earl's Court. In 2015, he moved into his current TA.

He believes that people who are new to the borough have been offered permanent accommodation ahead of him.

He has three children and is entitled to a three-bedroom property, but they only have two bedrooms. He is still waiting and is having to deal with a lot of problems. The basement flat they moved into had very dangerous stairs and he was afraid his pregnant wife might fall down them. The stairs were not suitable for children either.

The health visitor agreed that the stairs were dangerous, but when the housing services came to look at the stairs, they were very rude and said they would do nothing about them.

There were so many rats outside their property that he filmed them and sent the video to the Council. They eventually called the owner to get rid of them, but it took from 2015 until mid-2020 for the rat problem to be resolved!

They had a problem with their water supply, but again it took the Council a year and a half to deal with the problem. The boiler was affected and now needs to be fixed and they may not have hot water or electricity for two months. The Council does not know about the boiler yet and he is worried they might try to move the family to another temporary property outside the borough when they find out. If that happens, he will refuse to move.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

He is 48 years old and feels strongly that he needs a permanent home. Their situation is insecure and it has created conflicts and issues with his wife. The family need to be close to the children's school and close to their community.

He is very frustrated by the situation. He is not stable, he's not working (his circumstances made him stop working), and the children are stressed and worried.

The children's bedroom is too small - there is not enough room for three beds, so the youngest child has to sleep with the parents.

The Council does not listen at all. He sent them all his medical information and someone called him and was very rude. She asked him stupid questions and refused his case under his health conditions.

Someone from the Council promised to call him back and tell him how long the wait for a direct offer would be (there are 700 people before him), but she never called him back.

They never tell him how long he needs to keep bidding for.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

He has received support from anyone, nothing. The only advice to bid and to wait, and he is 48.

He told them: "I will die before I get my permanent place and my son will have to take over."

He thinks it is like a random lottery to house people and they choose five people on the day. The only advice from other people has been to keep calling them, which didn't help.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

There has been nothing positive.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

Everything has been awful, and for a one and a half year old and during the pandemic, people have been coming and going checking various things. Having strangers in their home has been really stressful. He and his wife were worried about coronavirus, but he had to let the people in so they could fix the boiler.

His wife was not at all comfortable having strangers in their home.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

He was not expecting to wait so long in TA.

What advice would you give to others?

He would advise others to complain but to be aware that the staff do not listen. They are very rude and they tell lies. Also, he thinks that plenty of flats are empty.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

They should consider the oldest applications on the waiting list and give them priority.

He needs more than 100 points, but there is nothing he can do about it. The housing officer said, "He can't get anything with only 100 points".

TA is very expensive. They should make more social housing with cheaper rents which people can access.

They should make sure there is no corruption. He knows some people pay to get housed or lie in their applications.

They should keep in touch and follow up with people in TA.

It should count for something if you are a good tenant, and it should be taken into consideration.

4. Iyah

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She and her parents and sister have lived in the same Council property for 36 years. Approximately ten years ago, in 2011, her mother became ill with Parkinson's Disease. They have been trying to be rehoused ever then.

Her mother became increasingly unwell until she was unable to use the stairs to their 4th floor flat. The Council have repeatedly refused to provide any equipment for her and refused an internal stairlift. For the last six years, since 2015, her mother has been completely housebound.

Following Grenfell, the fire brigade informed both the family and the Council that it was not safe for the family to continue living there, as they would not be able to rescue her mother in the event of a fire.

The housing services told her that because her mother was disabled, they could not bid for properties and instead, the Disabled Housing team would offer them properties. Over the last ten years, they have been offered only three properties and none of them has been suitably adapted for her mother's needs.

Her mother's care package is set up within the borough and she really needs to stay there for that reason.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

The housing services offered no support whatsoever. The staff had a menacing and sometimes hostile manner. There was no sense of urgency or accountability, and the complaints process is not fit for purpose. There is supposed to be a 15 day response time to complaints, but staff openly admit that they always go beyond that limit.

"They are a group of people who feel above the law." "They are not providing a service. It is like a weird cartel and there are rumours of some accepting bribes."

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing/on the housing register?

There have been no changes in the ten years the family have been asking to move. This is despite her mother being entirely housebound and stuck in a flat on the 4th floor, which the fire brigade cannot reach.

In 2016, they were offered two properties in Ladbrooke Grove, but when they arrived, the housing officer refused to show them the second property as she said she wanted to give it to another family. The first property was totally unsuitable. The corridor was too narrow for a wheelchair and the occupational therapist accompanying them confirmed that her mother's hospital bed would have been wall to wall in the tiny bedroom and it would have been impossible to walk around it.

The family insisted on seeing the second property and with the installation of a disabled wet room and other adaptations, it could have suited them well. However, no changes were allowed as it was a new build.

The family refused both properties as they were unsuitable for her mother's medical needs and the housing services threatened to remove them from the register. As a disabled person, you have two chances and then you're out unless you have someone fighting your side. Many people cave in to pressure and accept unsafe accommodation, which is why there were disabled people living high up in Grenfell Tower.

In Dec 2016, the family was offered a flat in Grenfell Tower, but thankfully they refused on the grounds that they would not be able to get her mother out in the event of a fire.

In 2020, they were told they had to wait for someone to move so that they could take over a property, but so far, they are still waiting.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

The whole family's mental health has suffered from the misery of seeing her mother suffer and from the stress of continuously having to fight the Council.

Her mother can't get downstairs and can't leave the flat, so even basic things like visiting friends, getting her hair cut or going to the GP are impossible. Her mother's mental health has deteriorated to the extent that she hallucinates at times and counselling is no longer an option. For years they tried to get her virtual counselling, but it was never allowed, as it HAD to be face to face. Then the Covid pandemic struck and because able-bodied people needed online counselling, it was suddenly and miraculously allowed. She sees this as a clear example of discrimination against disabled people.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it? (RBKC Council, voluntary organisations – friends and family, other – google search)

They have received no support. She and her sister have had to do everything themselves, alone. They have recently involved their MP, but still, nothing has happened.

Regarding the housing services staff, "If you hate people so much, don't try to provide services to people."

What have been the positive things about your experience?

There has been nothing positive about it at all.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

The worst thing about the experience has been seeing her mother's physical, emotional and mental deterioration. She has had to have counselling herself in order to cope. It has been exhausting and overwhelmingly depressing to follow every avenue and still not be able to help her mother.

They have been strung along for years.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was surprised by the corruption in the system, surprised that case managers were not assigned.

Surprised that there was no escalation process and no initiative. Surprised at the disregard for individuals and the lack of attention to detail. Surprised that there was no way of prioritising disabled people and no quota for disabled housing. Surprised at the inability of leadership to bring in accountability.

She was also surprised that there are almost no suitably adapted disabled properties even in the private sector within the borough. She has worked hard with the aim of buying a property herself in order to house her mother, but there are simply no properties for disabled people, either in social housing or on the private market. Private landlords are unwilling to install wet rooms for disabled people.

What advice would you give to others?

Take legal action against the Council if you can.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The Council should bring in affordable rent. Able-bodied people do not need social housing; they need affordable rent.

They should bring in performance metrics and targets to motivate staff to find homes for the most vulnerable.

There should be a clear escalation process when someone's health is in danger.

There should be a quota for disabled housing. Disabled people are being marginalised and forgotten and they do not have a voice.

The Council needs to root out the corruption and personal interest in the system. A housing officer told her, "There is a system in this borough of making deals". She has observed favouritism on many occasions.

The Council needs to prioritise disabled people.

5. Meena

What was your situation/ what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She was living in a hotel when she was single. In 2014, she had a studio with a housing association. She registered on the housing register in 2017 when she had a baby. She has been bidding since then from a studio where she lives with three children aged 4, 3, 18 months.

The studio is too small and very damp (for two years) and not suitable for health reasons as her daughter has eczema and she herself has asthma. They have proof of this from their GP.

She is bidding for a 3-bedroom property. She has 200 points because she and her children are overcrowded.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

She received no support or advice from the housing services. She was given no choice about her housing and had to take it or be left with no housing. She does not understand the points system or what points are available.

When she tries to contact the Council, they simply advise her to keep bidding. The Citizen Advice Bureau also advises her to keep bidding.

She does not know her rights and is given no information by the Council. The Council doesn't care about them having to live in such conditions. They do not take into consideration the health conditions of the family living in an unsuitable place.

Because of the damp, the agent from the housing association advised her to keep her window open and the heating on all the time, which is very expensive.

What changes have there been to your situation?

Six months ago, part of the ceiling fell on her daughter because of the damp. Because her daughter was not obviously injured, the housing services said they would not take it into consideration.

She was very shocked when this happened and shocked at their reaction.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

It is a very hard experience and very stressful. The place is too small, cooking is difficult, and during the Covid pandemic, it was extremely hard to stay at home with three young children.

She has provided evidence of her daughter's eczema and her own asthma, but it has made no difference and she only has 200 points which is not enough to move quickly to another property. She needs more points to be able to move.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

No one provided any support at all.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

Nothing.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

Her eldest child, her four-year-old daughter, has to sleep on the floor. She feels so sorry for her as she is constantly asking for her own bed and her own bedroom.

She is a single mum, and it is hard for her to deal with her living situation.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was not expecting to live with her children in these circumstances and for her children to have nowhere to play.

She was not expecting to have to wait so long and not to be helped. And she is shocked to be only told to keep bidding and that the Council have told her that hers is not an emergency situation.

What advice would you give to others?

The tenant would advise others to be patient because they might have to wait ten years or longer to be housed. "You would die before you got housed."

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The Council told her that people from Grenfell are their priority, but she does not understand why until now they are not housed yet to allow other people who are waiting to get housed.

The Council should be helpful and make it easier to get housed. They should take all peoples circumstances into consideration.

6. Cho

What was your situation/ what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

Prior to joining the register, I was homeless. I couldn't afford to pay rent in London and it was hard to live with family. I moved in 2017 when I was pregnant. I used to live in West London. I live in Essex, where I don't feel welcome. I gave birth to a baby girl who will be four years old in June. I didn't know it was like this at first, it was after a while I realised it wasn't like West London, where people mix.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

I was placed in TA. I received two calls during the pandemic to ask me if I was okay. I didn't feel that was enough.

I contacted RBKC in 2019. I sent my doctor's note for anxiety and depression as well as a note regarding the physiotherapy sessions I do. I haven't received any response from them.

I am planning to apply for PIP because my health is not good. My health is getting worse.

What changes have there been to your situation?

My family is living in West London. I don't have friends or neighbours. People aren't friendly, nor helpful and racist. I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression. I feel sad and hopeless. I am not happy. I want to hurt myself sometimes to get rid of the pain. I have started to take medicines for anxiety and depression. I am seeing a psychologist. I feel lonely and fearful - I live on the ground floor. My neighbour is noisy, and her behaviour is threatening with teenage sons. Whenever I make a complaint to the local Council, the anti-social behaviour gets worse.

E.g., before lockdown, I went to a pub/restaurant. I was treated very badly by a pub/restaurant manager. He told me to get a table outside with my daughter.

Or once, I was walking on the streets, a lady was staring at me. I feel like it's only if you are white and blue eyes. Not everyone is the same, but most show me they don't approve of the way I look. I look different from the people where I currently live (I have dark skin). If I was wearing the hijab, I am scared I could have been killed. I am British. I came to this country when I was 14 years old. I am just a normal girl. Easy going!

During the lockdown, I would take the bus with my daughter to the grocery store and come back by cab.

I look over my shoulder. Since Sarah Everard died, I feel even less safe. It's been ages since I haven't been out at night. I always take a cab because I don't feel safe.

I am really worried about my daughter that something happens to her.

If something happens to me, e.g. I die, no one would know because no one comes to me and I have no friendly neighbours and friends where I live.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

There are few jobs available, so it makes it hard to find a job in my area. I would like to have to travel.

The bus comes once every hour. I am the only one doing the school run.

I am doing some courses online to improve my skills. However, it's hard. My anxiety and depression make me feel down. I am always crying. I feel sad. I don't trust strangers. I need to know I will feel safe with strangers.

I would like to be moved back to London. If not RBKC, then Enfield.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

Not really!

What have been the positive things about your experience?

My daughter likes to go to the nursery.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

Not feeling welcome. I feel alone. I live too far from my family (two hours: by bus and train - it's far and expensive). I don't drive. I want to be safe.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

The flat is not in good condition. The window facing the street is broken. As well as the bathroom window. I have contacted the agency. Someone came and checked but didn't come back to fix it. The agency keeps ignoring the issues. I am about to give up.

What advice would you give to others?

I wouldn't advise single parents to accept a move into TA in a remote area.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

Families need to be put in safe and good areas (well connected - feeling welcome), safe and secure accommodation. The Council should take into consideration families' personal circumstances.

The Council needs to be transparent on the bidding system and honest with tenants.

7. Sia

What was your situation/ what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

In 2004 She moved from Greece with her two small children (three and four and a half) to work as an illustrator in the UK.

She rented privately in RBKC for four years, but after that, she struggled to find work that paid enough for her to be able to afford her rent.

By 2012 she had become homeless, and she was given TA and started receiving full housing benefit as a single parent.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

She didn't receive any advice or support. She tried calling the Council numerous times in the hope of getting some advice. At one time, she was calling the Council daily but still getting nowhere. She felt outraged with the system.

There were adverts and posters about getting help but when she applied there was nothing. She felt, "You only get help if you're born here or know someone in the system that wants to help."

She was not aware that she had a choice and that she could refuse to leave the borough. She was never made aware of this option even though she had small children in primary school. She was simply told to move out against her will, without a choice.

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing?

1) She moved to her first property in 2012 when her kids were 11 and nine years old. The first property was approximately 18 miles from Holland Park School. They lived there for five years.

2) In 2017, they moved to a property in Essex between Newbury Park Station and Gants Hill station. She was furious that they been moved so far from the school because that meant that she was unable to work because she had to take kids to school. It also meant that they would be late most of the time due to delays and that they would even have to miss school when there were no trains.

The first week they were there, her daughter was robbed at knifepoint on her way home from school. Her daughter used to plead to move away from the house and the area as she did not feel safe. She felt helpless and that she had failed as a mother because she could not help her kids. She became sick afterwards because of all the stress and was unable to look after the kids properly. She was often in hospital because of extreme migraines.

3) Four years later, they moved to Tower Hamlets. The station was about a ten-minute walk and it used to take an hour to travel the ten miles to school.

In this accommodation, they had people coming in without their permission (especially the landlord), which is illegal and a breach of contract. The inspectors used to turn up without an appointment and they would refuse to come another time. The family had no privacy.

4) Two years later, they moved again to their current property, which is also in Tower Hamlets. Their contract was for two years, but the landlord passed away and, therefore, the contract got extended.

Within a couple of weeks of moving into this property, they already had issues. The stove was extremely dangerous and was a massive health and safety risk. They had been promised that the kitchen would be renovated when they moved in as it was falling apart. But no renovation has taken place and the mould in the flat has caused the kids problems with their health.

She suffers from extreme anxiety, extreme depression and extreme stress. She no longer goes out in busy locations and she avoids transport at all costs.

All the Council has said is, "Thousands of people are on the waiting list and you have to wait."

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

The family's mental health has been damaged by everything they have experienced.

She's children display anger/anxiety and anti-social behaviour. As a result of always living in bad conditions, her children are growing up already angry with the world.

She feels she cannot be productive when she doesn't have a safe place to live. She feels she can't grow as a person. She lost her job when she was moved out of RBKC as she needed to travel with her son back to his old school, which took hours every day. Her son wasn't given a school place close to the new TA. He was on the waiting list, so they had to travel back to his old school in Notting Hill.

Travelling for a long time daily was exhausting for her small children.

Her daughter has asthma from living in poor conditions - especially from the mould and damp.

They also have problems sleeping - because of constant loud noises.

All properties they have been offered have been filthy.

She was shortlisted and was close to getting a property three times, but no property was finalized. She has only refused one property she was offered - she always feels like she is going backwards.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

No one has ever helped them and no organisations have reached out.

The Citizens Advice Bureau have told her they cannot give advice on housing.

The housing line has never helped and she was treated badly when she called it.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

She loves London and all things it offers but life here is impossible.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

She felt the process is like a joke.

"People lie to you all the time, it's like theatre."

No one wants to take responsibility in the Council. It is the worst customer services she has ever seen.

She complained to RBKC a month ago - about the unfairness of the bidding process - but they said, "we will not answer you as the answer is too complicated."

She finds it extremely draining - having to keep writing emails and complaining and repeating her story.

She feels people are badly treated in social housing - the living conditions are very poor. The properties are very badly maintained. They are not insulated and there are no safety checks and there is no quality control.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She had expected the UK to be a country that cared about its people.

She was surprised by the extreme conditions and said these are not average problems.

She had not expected Council staff not to want to take responsibility.

What advice would you give to others?

She feels the system didn't work for her.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

She would like to see a fairer and more transparent system with a clear process for bidding. The Council should not use excuses and like Grenfell and Covid.

They should treat people with respect. They should be clear and honest with people and should not lie. They should be ready to answer questions. She feels the borough should look after families and people.

The rent should be lower as it does not allow people to live without claiming benefits, especially for young families.

The Council needs to deal with people who fake things – such as fake paperwork - in order to abuse the system and get properties. The Council should investigate properties and investigate people's income as many people are hiding wealth and they should have their housing taken away. Some tenants have luxury cars, parties and holidays. Some people get landlords to evict them on purpose so that they can qualify for Council housing. Many criminals need to be thrown out of the system.

"Our families mental health has been damaged. We have anger anxiety - headaches - anti-social behaviour in my kids. Always living in bad conditions – the children growing up are already angry with the world. My daughter has asthma from poor living conditions - especially affected by the mould. You can't be productive when you don't have a safe place to live. You can't grow as a person. I lost my job when I was moved out of RBKC as I couldn't get my children into a local school and had to travel with my son back to the old school, which took hours every day. Travelling for a long time daily is exhausting for small kids. They also have sleeping issues - because of constant loud noise. All properties I was offered were in a filthy state."

8. Ori

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She joined the register late in 2019. She had been living with her husband and son, who has special needs, in a one-bed apartment. They decided to downsize to a studio apartment so that they could start saving money. They had found a place and were all set when, two days before they were due to move, the seller took her deposit and ran off with it leaving them homeless. They went to the town hall the next day and signed up for the register.

It took RBKC five days to house them, which was stressful and absolutely unbelievable to her husband, but when they did, it was in a good standard, two-bed property. Especially compared to so many other stories she has heard from others going through the same process. She feels she cannot complain too much about being there for only 18 months and they are thankfully not overcrowded.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

RBKC told her that they would find her and her family a place to stay that night no matter what, although, in reality, it took them five days. However, she is nothing but thankful that RBKC did provide them with shelter. She was in absolute shock to be suddenly homeless with her husband and child. Her entire world had been turned upside down. She very much appreciated the initial security and empathy they received from the workers that she faced and dealt with at RBKC.

However, they could not fulfil their first promise of housing them that very night. They kept forgetting her case day after day, so she kept having to go back and say, "Hey can you house us?" She thought RBKC said they would house them by nightfall on the first night. Initially, RBKC told her they were really sorry and that they just had to manage on their own for now. They literally didn't have anywhere to stay. RBKC didn't seem to realise this, so they had to sleep in different places (mother and husband in a hostel) and her son went to sleep with the grandparents on the first night.

The second night she rented a van overnight and used that to collect all of their items from the previous property – where the items and possessions had all been flung out onto the street, it was traumatising. Lots of their things had evidently been stolen and broken and most of the remaining possessions were dirty, broken or not worth the effort of salvaging and carrying them with them while trying to find places to sleep. She spent the next day working to try and get all the remaining things they owned into storage. She hired a van for this and they used it to sleep in as well.

Her husband slept in the van overnight while she and her son slept on the carpet of a hallway of the accommodation that was supposed to be theirs once the Council had got the landlord to come and let them into their new place (their TA). They'd been told the address but told that the landlord needed to come and assess the property of living in and needed to unlock it and hand over the keys etc. She and her son ended up sleeping on the carpet by a radiator, using their coats and clothes as bedding and pillows. She was just so grateful to be warm and dry and allowed to be let inside the hallway of the soon-to-be apartment building that was to be their TA home.

After the fifth day, they were let into the property that they are staying in now, the two-bed TA, which she is beyond thankful for. She says that 'The best thing about being homeless is the absolute kindness of people.' Her husband was annoyed and irritated at her, but she said that being horrible doesn't get you anywhere. He wanted her to get angry and irritated, but she told him that's not how it works. The kindness of people and of yourself is what will help in the end, she tells him.

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing?

First joined 27th October 2019. Five days of sleeping in hallways, vans, hostels and sofas waiting to be placed.

Placed in TA - 2 November 2019 to present day.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

She and her husband have both lost their jobs. She cannot even begin to imagine the impact on her son.

Her son has special needs and specifically doesn't like trains, so they have to go with him to school on buses there and back again every single day because he cannot move schools due to it simply being impossible to find him adequate treatment and care in an educational setting anywhere else. Disrupting this would cause her son far too much stress and a plethora of other negative impacts. So, she spends 8 hours a day (2 hours there then back for herself, then pick up in the afternoon 2 hours back again on buses). She spends 4 hours plus every single weekday on a bus, minimum, for her son's education. Her son has been impacted so much. He is far from his friends, his schools, help and support. She says she has had to put a mothers' face on for everything. She cannot even begin to describe her pain.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

RBKC workers have helped a little bit from time to time. Predominantly she has two very good best friends and they all support one another mentally and logistically with childcare, forms, contacting people and so on. During lockdown, she has started working from home and she has a personal mentor who helps her a lot and again, like she previously said, she only surrounds herself with positive, supportive people and that's how she copes.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

She was so grateful for having somewhere to turn to – RBKC housing department was able to support her and her family and knowing that she is nowhere near in the worst situation at all compared to others on the list is something that makes her thankful. She is hyper-aware that she could have it so much worse and could be having to endure it for so much longer, so she is thankful to be in the position she is in comparative to the unluckiest.

The many hours of waiting in the town hall have meant that she has been able to help many other applicants fill out forms and with their applications. Simply helping others in need helps her feel good and valuable and that she is having a positive impact on the community.

Also, being able to sit and wait for help was somehow a positive thing. Just being able to be dry and warm. It's also very helpful knowing that there is a system that looks after people like her. She tells me that in these awful situations, that was very reassuring. Her overall experience with all the staff was extremely friendly too at the town hall and when seeking support initially.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

Seeing people who she thought would help, who didn't. Such as family members and 'close' friends. Whereas strangers and people she wouldn't expect it from seemed to be more helpful.

Being in the Zoom Focus Group and hearing others' stories was absolutely petrifying. She thought the wait would be a couple of years, not nearly two decades waiting in TA to have permanent housing allocated. That is absolutely the worst thing and she hasn't been able to stop thinking about it.

She wouldn't mind if they were just told honestly and upfront, 'okay, you are going to be here seven maybe eight/nine years' then that way, you can plan, orchestrate and anticipate how to live your life moving forward. Transparency and honest communication about wait times and life options need to be far more thoroughly outlined and explained to applicants.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was very surprised to see other people in their situations for so long. She was absolutely shocked at how badly others were being treated and for how long.

How can all these procedures and the system have been audited and deemed fit for purpose when not a single person at the meeting or in the system can sing praises of RBKC housing? She is just extremely surprised that there has been auditing that concluded nothing wrong with a system that is clearly very broken / not working with people waiting decades and thousands are out of borough.

What advice would you give to others?

Find out what information you need. Actively go out there, research and identify what you really want and need?

Think outside the box. Use websites, go to other Boroughs, don't be scared of going into town halls and doing what you know needs to happen. Do what you can do to take control. What you can't do/control, you simply cannot control. But what you can, do that. Goal planning, set objectives, and achievements and never give up.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The TA people in RBKC should all be on a shared forum so TA tenants could support and help one another and discuss their own related things/issues.

RBKC need to make promises to a priority top 10 or top 20 and then commit to housing these people.

There should be complete transparency with the Auditing. Who is doing the auditing? TA residents deserve far more transparency around this and the entire allocation process. It needs major re-evaluation and system overhauls. Changes need to be made bit by bit and eventually, everything can change.

RBKC's website should be made super-simple. So that if you don't speak good English, you can still understand it. Suggests an online forum for connection between applicants and frequently asked questions with a guaranteed response of 3-5 days.

Allocate one officer to 10 cases specific cases and they cannot move on until they have done those 10 cases. This would personalise the cases of the families/applicants and the worker/Council. That way, the worker and Council will fight way harder and achieve more successful end results for applicants.

Suggests a system with modules on things like 'how to clean', 'access to the bidding system' 'a good tenant' 'New Skills modules'. When two applicants are tied, then the one who has done most modules would get the property? Trying to help lessen the number of people on the list by educating them and helping them.

Maybe if a house becomes available in a different Borough / own Borough, then having a virtual tour should be a precursor to being able to bid on properties so that people cannot just simply bid on any and everything. Perhaps also properties should have eligibility criteria for the properties, like have you completed that skill or course?

9. Etta

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

Etta is an NHS nurse with over 20 years of service. Her marriage broke down in 2013, her husband left, and her home was repossessed. She started renting privately in 2014. By 2017, She had to join the housing register in RBKC as she had no other choice.

With three children in primary school, it was very hard to look after them while working as an NHS nurse and simultaneously trying to find and afford secure tenure for her family. Joining the register felt like an admittance of failure to herself and her children, but it had all become too much and she had no choice financially.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

She got barely any help or information from RBKC housing services at the beginning. They tried to send her and her children to Barking in 2017. She kept refusing and they said that if she kept rejecting the properties, then they would take her off the register. She felt forced into accepting what they said and that she had no choice. She felt at the mercy of the department and the housing officers.

In late 2017, they moved her and her three children to East Ham which was also far from where she was working. It was a struggle for Etta and her children to settle, but she had to endure it after such a long time resisting the department.

They did not enjoy those years. She was studying for a degree while working as a nurse, which was stressful. She had to use large parts of her student loan to pay for the housing and other problems with the property that required fixing during the years in East Ham.

She feels no one at RBKC listens to her problems and no one understands the risks she has had to put her children through due to the places and properties she has felt forced to move into by RBKC.

The housing officers don't understand that just because people are on the housing register, it doesn't mean that they deserve horrible circumstances, a lack of human decency and no opportunities for a good quality of life. She believes RBKC have a very negative perception of people in housing situations like hers. People in such need should not be stereotyped so horribly.

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing?

Joined RBKC register – 2017 - temp. Accommodation in RBKC -2017. Temp. Accommodation in East Ham - 2017
Temp. Accommodation in Hackney – 2018 until now

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

Logistical issues like the increased travel time to see friends and her support network was hard. As an NHS nurse, she was, and still is, able to relocate and start working at another hospital closer to her new place as needed – yet this was still an irritation and an upheaval. Her children had to move schools too when they were moved.

The temporary housing had a massive negative impact on her hopes, desires and mindset. She feels helpless with her low number of points and low priority. She feels reliant on the Council and Government for her housing, money and way of life and it has eroded her independence and confidence and brought depression into her life.

She was on the brink of committing suicide when her mental health got very bad – her pastor told her that he thought he was never going to see Etta again when he saw her at her worst period in 2019.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

Her priest & pastors at RBKC Church helped and supported her through years of hardship. They provided the kind of listening and support that was completely absent at RBKC housing. Her doctor helped by recommending a psychologist for counselling, who in turn helped her find a much better place mentally. That, in turn, helped her be a better mother for her children in these tough times.

Support from RBKC was minimal regarding helping her or understanding her family's case. For example, one time, they offered her a property where her son couldn't even fit through a single doorway even though she had repeatedly told RBKC that she has a very tall, large son. RBKC had multiple opportunities to listen and note simple things and requirements like this but let her down repeatedly.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

RBKC helping to get her into TA at the very outset was positive. It felt like she was finally being seen, heard and being given help by the Council, but that was the sum total of positive encounters with them.

Unfortunately, all other experiences with RBKC have been extremely negative.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

When she was moved to East Ham in January 2017, RBKC contacted her to say that she had only a weekend in which to move out. She went to speak to them about it, but while she was out, an agency hired by RBKC used a sledgehammer to break open the door of her temporary property and evicted her children and their possessions from the property. Her children were shocked and terrified and they are scarred by the experience.

Another huge negative is how overcrowded her property is. She doesn't have a table or chairs in her living room. The property is supposed to be a three-bedroom property, but it is actually a two-bedroom property. There is no space to put her belongings and no space for living.

She feels it is extremely hard to get guidance, advice and help from the housing services, which you would expect would readily and actively seek you out and want to help you. She has been fighting a nearly impossible fight to even stay afloat for years.

Not being given any clarity from RBKC on timelines, wait times and properties is very hard. Being told six weeks or six months to wait when it always changes, and it actually takes years, is an insult and very counterproductive. They can't relax or settle in their own minds.

She just wants to be told the truth. Even if the wait is that long, you can mentally come to terms with it, prepare and plan your life. It is the lack of transparency and certainty that creates problems and distrust - sometimes, it feels that what she is being told is all lies. It is extremely hard for her to trust when, at any given moment, she could be told she has only 48 hours to move again to somewhere unknown.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She wasn't expecting to lose faith in the process, system and hope as quickly as she did – that was surprising for her. She has no faith in RBKC's housing allocation or housing system.

She was surprised at the way she has been treated by the system, RBKC department and its employees. She feels that they place all applicants into a stereotype of someone on the housing register. She didn't expect the lack of humanity she has experienced during many different interactions.

She was surprised by the length of average wait times, by the shortage of properties and that her points counted for so little. She had no idea the wait for permanent housing would be as long as she has now learnt through Focus Group Meetings that it probably will be.

What advice would you give to others?

"Don't give up – fight and chase down workers and be proud and don't give in to the pre-formed conceptions of those on the registers, the idea that they are all 'bad' 'criminals' and 'deserve it'. The stereotypes are so strong and relied upon to the point that even RBKC housing workers treat you the way general society looks/treats those on the housing register. Don't let your mindset and yourself cave into these conceptions of how society and RBKC see you as a poor, not deserving person who will forever be stuck being reliant upon the government and help."

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

Sorting out the allocation system and the housing supply must be imperative for RBKC as there are too many people like her and her children who need a permanent, stable home.

She wants to work, to contribute to society and to own her own place again. She went to University to get qualified, to get a better job and to contribute. That is why between 2014 and 2017, she fought for so long before going on RBKC's housing register. However, she feels that once you're in the system, it doesn't matter how hard you fight or if you want to do better or improve your life or set a good example for your children. The amount you put in and your mindset should make a difference.

RBKC need to treat people in her situation like other members of society, as they are no less human than people not on the housing register. She owned a house before her divorce and is a good citizen and doesn't understand why she has been treated poorly simply because she is on the housing register.

It would help if the Council offered personal storage for people in TA. Then people wouldn't be living on top of each other in such extreme and crowded conditions.

RBKC should check that properties are ready and liveable. Otherwise, the government is literally throwing money away for unfit properties to private landlords. They have been housed with unfit electricity, no gas, no insulation, disgusting mattresses and horrible, loud neighbours. If the inspector wouldn't live there, how can they ask a family to live there? How is it ok for them to have to live with cockroaches and rodents? They have been placed alongside criminals, smokers and drinkers – and she wants to be as far away from these types of people and ways of life as possible.

She feels she has been in danger of going insane from having to constantly fight and complain and yet still be ignored by RBKC. Years of complaining without being listened to have made her believe that RBKC is purposely and intentionally neglecting her and other families like hers.

10. Ma

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She spent 14 years caring for her mother at a property in Sloane Square and lost her job as a result.

In 2017, her mother died in her arms and she struggled terribly with her loss.

She started to rent somewhere privately and paid six months' rent in advance, plus eight weeks' deposit.

Six months after moving in, she had to claim Universal Credit, but as it was not backdated, she did not have enough money even for food and necessities. She is not working and has become increasingly depressed. She was unable to cry or talk to anyone about her feelings and could only speak to her mother's picture.

Her current landlord intends to sell the property and has served an eviction notice. In October 2018, she received a letter asking her to move out by January 2019.

For six months, agents came and went and then, in March 2020, Covid-19 arrived, and the pandemic began. Throughout it all, she has continued paying her rent.

She is alone in the UK, with her family abroad. She still has her mother's dog and could never bear to be parted from him as he is all she has left from her mother. She says she would rather live on the streets than leave the dog.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

With help, she has written to the Council several times, but she has received no assistance.

What changes have there been to your situation since you went into temporary housing?

She is in the same accommodation.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

She received a letter saying she would be thrown out in two weeks' time, and the threat of eviction has been extremely stressful and frightening. She was supposed to move out on 25th February 2021.

She is so frightened she can't sleep and has to take sleeping pills. She claims she will commit suicide if they try to evict her. She says she feels lonely, worthless and suicidal.

"I can't sleep at night. I am always scared. I received a letter stating the bailiffs will take me out of the property within two weeks. I am so fearful. I said to myself once they come, I will kill myself."

She has serious medical needs and a nurse used to visit her twice a day before the Covid pandemic hit. She has great difficulty walking as she gets blisters on her feet and legs. She cannot manage the stairs in her flat and has to be helped from room to room. For over a year, a friend has been taking her dog out every day for 10 minutes.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

A friend is trying to help her. She contacted her lawyer, who wrote a letter to postpone the section 21 - notice of eviction to the end of May.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

Nothing.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

The deterioration of her health has been awful. Three months ago, she got Covid-19 and spent two weeks in a coma. She is still not well.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was surprised and disappointed not to have been supported by RBKC.

What advice would you give to others?

She doesn't have any.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

She would like the Council to be considerate when dealing with urgent as well as non-urgent matters.

11. Tina

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She became homeless after she and her husband separated. In July 2018, she and her four children needed to be housed.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

She was not given any options or choices and received no advice and no support whatsoever. The housing services did whatever they wanted to. Only her social worker provided any support.

What changes have there been to your situation?

She and her children have been in their current situation for three years.

She pays the rent and is a good tenant. She receives no benefits (only part of housing benefit) because she is a hard-working person.

She wants to go back to RBKC, where she lived for 17 years. Her children were all born in RBKC and her extended family lives there. She is a steward at her church in RBKC, close to her children's school. She knows that she has to stay strong for her children.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

Her children, aged 15, 12, 9, 5, are unhappy. They are far from family, friends and the support they need.

It takes them an hour and a half to get to school. They have to get up at 5.30 am in order to get to school and to her workplace on time. She has been a carer in RBKC for eight years.

All the extra travelling is costing much more money than she can afford.

The Council refuses to bring them back and just tells her to keep bidding. She is constantly bidding, but only has 150 points.

She feels they have no life where they now are. Her children are always asking her when they can go back. She feels very alone and has no one there. The whole experience has been too stressful, both mentally and physically. She is very anxious, constantly wondering when they will be able to go back to their borough, where they belong. She has no answers. When Hammersmith Bridge closed, she had suicidal thoughts.

She has had no contact from the TA team. She has received no support at all. No one has even asked if they are ok. They only care about money.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

The social worker told her to take the TA, not knowing they would be stuck there for so long. She told her she had no choice and that it would not be for long (probably not knowing herself).

She has no idea how long they will have to stay there. She has no information at all.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

Nothing. There has only been negativity!

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

They have been housed in an unsafe environment. The police are constantly coming to the building because of drugs, arguments, and fights.

It is not an appropriate place to raise children, but the Council won't listen. She raised her concerns with a housing officer who then left the Council and didn't help her.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was not expecting to be given a property outside the borough. She was shocked and broke down when she was told, but they said that if she did not take it, they would let her become homeless. They did not give her a choice and they did not care about her children's wellbeing.

The housing officer who allocated the property was very arrogant and told her: "If you don't take it, you are potentially making yourself homeless and will not be given another place".

She fought hard to refuse it, but it was hopeless. Her social worker attended the meeting with her and heard what the officer said.

What advice would you give to others?

You need to be strong for your children because it can break you.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The Council should listen and care about children because being moved away from the Borough affects them mentally so much.

They should listen more to people and offer options instead of kicking people out without caring about their wellbeing.

12. Odet

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

In 2017 she was made homeless initially due to domestic abuse and lack of safety and security. She had to leave.

In 2018 RBKC gave her 100 points and put her in TA in Tower Hamlets, Bethnal Green – out of the Borough, even though she was born in RBKC and has lived there her entire life.

Her children went to school in the Borough and her elderly mother, who helps care for her children, and who she cares for, also lives in RBKC. She worked as a midwife in an NHS hospital in RBKC. Being placed outside the Borough wore her down mentally, physically and financially.

Once in Bethnal Green, she felt forgotten about. In the end, she decided to seek help elsewhere as it was clear RBKC wasn't going to. She reached out to local charities and the Citizens Advice Bureau, who advised her to write to her MP, which she duly did. Her RBKC MP replied that she wasn't eligible for help as she was in Bethnal Green. The local MP for Bethnal Green replied that she had been placed there from RBKC; she was RBKC's responsibility. This toing and froing continued for a few months until, with help from the Citizens Advice Bureau and local charities, she was eventually noticed, listened to and helped by RBKC. She was moved back into RBKC to a temporary property where she has been since 2019.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

Advice and support from RBKC were literally non-existent. The housing officer that contacted her was an absolutely horrible woman. When she contacted her RBKC worker to check on progress with her application and asked simple questions about the bidding system etc., the housing officer would be very harsh and shut her down, saying things like, "only if you get accepted" and "if we give you help".

She feels that councils just toss people back and forth. She couldn't believe how long it took for the Boroughs to decide whose responsibility she was. That does not seem right. She received advice and help from charities, Citizen Advice and campaigners and NONE from RBKC Council.

What changes have there been to your situation?

First, she went to Bethnal Green and was there for just over a year (2018-2019).

Since 2019, she has been in RBKC. She has since had another child and there are three of them now in a 2-bedroom property.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

With the kids schooling, her job and her mother all being in RBKC, being moved to Bethnal Green was a big strain and upheaval for them all. It affected her work life, her children's life and her bank account hugely due to the extensive extra travel costs needed.

She has since lost her job and is on benefits. She wants to give a proper life to her children and provide them with a family home, yet how will that ever happen if she is somehow better off now that she is on benefits compared to when she was working and trying extra hard for her family? She is a single mum, so she must take all of the responsibility for the children, housing, money, bills, everything.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

She has never received any advice or support from RBKC Council. She took it into her own hands and went to a few charities. Homeless ones that support people like her in the Bethnal Green area and then the Citizens Advice Bureau too. They helped her understand how to contact MPs and get noticed and fight her case in a far more effective manner than RBKC ever would. Lots of googling and speaking to charity reps and advisers on the phone also helped her.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

The best bit was going on benefits because she could stop working and look after her kids more adequately as a mother and actually have slightly more money to her name. She doesn't understand how a society/system can work in which she is better off on benefits. Work should pay. How can she show her kids that you should work hard in life if you want to progress?

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

Being moved out of Borough and being treated by RBKC like she wasn't their responsibility anymore was the absolute worst part of the experience so far.

She feels the Borough doesn't want people like her and her family. People in Council houses, without much money and struggling, is not the image the Borough wants, so they don't want to help those people properly. Charities and outside authorities helped so much more. Is it too much to expect RBKC workers to behave like decent human beings when it is their responsibility to help?

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

Being ignored, treated badly, and the complete lack of support from the Council was the most surprising. She was also surprised by the way she was bounced around and disregarded.

She was very surprised to learn that there is an average waiting time of over six years, as that means she is not even halfway to the average wait time yet. This is very scary and has impacted her mental health and her daily life and her ability to look after her children and look for work. The constant uncertainty of means she cannot plan her life and she fears it will pass her by before she knows it.

What advice would you give to others?

She advises others to find support elsewhere - from charities and the Citizens Advice Bureau. Camden charities were very helpful with household items and support. When you are in TA for several years, it is very important to look after your mental health because it is so easy for that to slip. Mental strength is the only thing that will help you get through it all.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The Council needs to be honest about the average wait or likely wait for properties. People are being told the average wait is six years, which gets peoples' hopes up, whereas the reality is that they will probably have to wait 10,15 or 18 years for housing in high demand categories and large properties.

RBKC really, really need to cut down the length of time that they are making people wait for permanent housing in the Borough. RBKC needs to build many more Council homes now or as soon as they possibly can. They need to stop selling land off.

The Council should give much more support to those who have lived in the community their whole lives. There is no support system and as soon as people are out of the borough, they are forgotten about. RBKC should call in and check on people to see if they've had children and the space has become too small.

RBKC should give more points for longer waiting times.

RBKC should treat everyone as equal and there should be no stigma for being on the housing register.

13. Mo

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

He used to live with his parents, but they asked him to move out and, therefore, he became homeless. He was married and had a one-and-a-half-year-old son at the time.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

He went to the Council with the letter from his parents – a notice to leave with a deadline.

In 2007, the Council gave him a two-bed property in Redbridge, Essex. There were no other options.

What changes have there been to your situation?

From 2007, he lived at the first property until the landlord wanted the property back.

In 2013, he was moved to another property in the same area (six miles away). By then, he had four children (three of them were at primary school) and the property had three bedrooms. Then that landlord also wanted his property back.

In May 2018, the family was moved two miles away to a four-bedroom house.

He has spent 14 years in TA and there are no properties available on the bidding system.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

The second move was difficult for the children who found it very hard living far away from their friends and their school. The Council told him, "If you don't accept the place, you will have to look for a property yourself". He was left without any options, and the family were very worried and stressed about their situation.

They struggled to take the children to school six miles away when they were at the second property.

Fortunately, the children now go to a school close to their home.

The children are well settled. He wants to stay in the area because they have been there such a long time and the children are very happy at their school and with their friends.

He is worried that he will be asked to move again and feels that it is going to happen soon. Living with this uncertainty means they have no stability or peace of mind.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

The Council are not at all supportive. There is a cracked window in his current property, which no one has come to fix for two years. He called the Council twice in 2019 to ask them to fix the window. The Council has never called him back or been helpful. They only call him when they want him to move.

He contacts his agent when he needs anything fixed and only calls the TA team if, after many attempts, he has still not been able to get hold of his agent.

What have been the positive things about your experience?

He has not had any positive experiences with the Council.

What were the worst thing or things about your experience?

A drain outside the house right next to their kitchen window blocked and stank horribly, but it took three months to get it fixed. The agent sent a plumber who refused to fix it because it was located outside the house and they then had to call Thames Water who eventually came and fixed it.

The other really bad experience was having to take three buses to get the children to school when they were younger (and at the second property).

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

He had not expected to be moved so many times and to spend more than 14 years in TA.

He was surprised at the lack of properties available on the bidding system. He is entitled to a four-bedroom property, but none are available on the bidding system. How can he bid when there is nothing available? He was surprised and disappointed to only be able to bid once in a year and a half.

What advice would you give to others?

He has no advice to give.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

The Council should give him a property in his current area as he has been living there for so long and does not want to return to RBKC. They are all well settled there, but the Council say they do not have any properties there.

The Council should consider the negative effect on his children if they are forced to move after so many years.

14. Cleo

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you first joined the housing register?

She has been in TA since 2013. She was in east London, but travelling was really exhausting and RBKC reviewed the situation and moved her to TA within the Borough. She has just had another child, but she had to chase the Council for two months before they upgraded her to the three-bed properties she is entitled to. She has been able to bid on three-bed properties since the New Year but has been unsuccessful so far.

She has 100 points for homelessness and 50 points for being employed. She works 30 hours a week but cannot earn enough to pay all her rent, so she is on housing benefit.

What support and advice did housing services provide at the beginning?

She received minimal support and assistance and had to continually go back and ask and chase people down for explanations. It took two months of her complaining that she had not been upgraded from two bed to three-bed properties for someone at the Council to make the change.

What changes have there been to your situation?

She was offered a place in Pimlico, but it was too far away that she had to refuse it. Childcare would not have worked and she would have lost her job and been even worse off. As a result, she has not been given the overcrowding points.

What impact has the housing had on you and your family?

She wants to set a good example for her children and show them that working hard results in just rewards but feels very discouraged by the system. How is she meant to teach her kids how to be and how to apply themselves to try to achieve when she is not rewarded for her own hard work?

She grew up in the borough and is well aware that she is bidding against people who are not overcrowded. She is also aware that some properties are under-occupied as children have moved out, and yet nothing is done about it. She feels it is a ridiculous situation, and she has found it intensely frustrating.

Dealing with the Council has been exasperating, as they are slow to make changes and update their system. For example, when she had another child, they took two months to upgrade her to a three-bed property.

What support and advice did you get through these years and who provided it?

She had not received help.

What have been the good things about the process?

None.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

She feels the worst thing is that the system does not reward a person for working hard. There is no incentive to strive and to work hard.

She is upset that loyalty, length of time, personal ties and what a person contributes to the community and gives back to the Borough are not recognised.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was surprised to be in TA for so long (since 2013) and for the system and those that apply it to be so dysfunctional.

What advice would you give to others?

She doesn't have any to give.

What changes would you like to see the Council make?

People should be given an additional 10, 20 or 30 points for working more than 16 hours a week. Otherwise, there is no incentive to work hard. This would help people set a good example for their children. At the moment, it seems that doing the bare minimum is what is rewarded.

There needs to be clarity about how the Council decides who gets into which criteria. What exactly is a health emergency? And who decides who meets what criteria?

There should maybe be a system so that on a weekly or monthly basis, each category of people has a chance to bid on properties.

More points should be given for community involvement.

People in work should be prioritised above unemployed people. An unemployed person with no work commitments and time constraints should not be allowed to choose where in the borough they can bid for properties.

There needs to be a complete review of how properties are allocated to people who need larger properties. The Council needs to be aware that some people living alone are renting out bedrooms themselves – and this is well known and wrong. The system is unfair.

B2 – Set 2

Set 2 includes five case studies of people who had recently moved into new properties and one who is waiting for more assistance.

1. Em

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you joined the housing register?

In 2017, aged 19, she was placed in a young people's hostel. The shared bathrooms and communal spaces and general atmosphere had a very negative effect on her mental health and she left to stay with a friend. Because she had left the young people's hostel of her own accord, the Council classified her as intentionally homeless.

During 2018, she and her care co-ordinator returned three times to the Council seeking accommodation for her until she was finally given emergency accommodation in a B&B in Notting Hill.

The B&B was an even worse environment for her than the young people's hostel and caused her a lot of anxiety. She called the Council but was told it was her only option. She only managed to stay there for one night.

She stayed with a friend and a week or two later returned to the Council with her care coordinator to ask for help. They offered her TA outside the borough, but she felt that was unacceptable as she needed her support network and to be close to the family members she helps care for. The Council then allocated her TA in a studio in the south of the borough, where she stayed for six months.

At that point, the Council backdated her points to the date she entered the young people's hostel and she was, therefore, able to bid for properties.

In November 2018, she placed a bid and was given a studio within a housing association which she moved into. Shortly thereafter, her relationship with her boyfriend became abusive and she needed to find a new home where he could not find her.

In early 2019, she moved into a refuge outside the borough to get away from her aggressive ex-boyfriend. Fortunately, her housing association reacted promptly and within three months, they had found her a new studio.

In August 2019, on her 21st birthday, she signed the papers for her current studio flat. She suffers from depression and anxiety but has managed to work intermittently during the process.

What support and advice did housing services provide?

She did not think she would have been able to navigate the housing services process without support from the mental health services and from her care coordinator. It was very hard for her to speak about her situation with the housing officers and she needed her care coordinator's presence and support.

She was frequently tearful and she appreciated that on occasion, the housing officers allowed her to speak to them in a private room at the Town Hall.

What was the best thing or things about the process?

The best thing about the process was the fact that the housing officers did eventually listen to her and understood that she needed to stay in the borough, close to her mental health support network and family.

Another plus was the speed with which the housing association found her a new studio to move into from the women's refuge.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

The worst thing about the process was having to sit in the Town Hall for whole days at a time waiting for a decision or news. It was exhausting and she felt it would have been better if they could have allowed her to leave and return when phoned to do so. She had a mobile and did not understand why she was obliged to stay at the Town Hall.

Another poor thing about the process was that the officers did not appear to understand her mental health needs. She was surprised that they expected her to cope, sharing facilities with strangers of all different ages. Her one night stay at her B&B was very unpleasant.

Are you happy with your new home?

Extremely happy. She has been able to decorate her new home and she is very proud of it.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was very surprised and grateful when the housing services backdated her points to the date she went into the young people's hostel.

She was also surprised to discover how many properties in the borough were Council properties.

What advice would you give to others?

She would advise all applicants to really push themselves to constantly follow up and repeatedly call the Council.

She would also advise anyone with emotional or medical needs to ensure they have individual support or evidence to support their case. She felt it would be extremely difficult to get anywhere without individual support or supporting letters, for example, from a GP.

She said there was no one at the Council to help point someone needing support in the right direction.

2. Ed

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you joined the housing register?

Towards the end of 2016, he found himself homeless. He sought help at the Town Hall, but they just directed him to 'first come-first served' homeless shelters where he could only stay for one night at a time.

He feels very fortunate that at that stage, he found Insight KC on Golborne Road, where he was welcomed and allocated a key worker who provided him with ongoing confidential support. His key worker helped him complete the necessary paperwork and accompanied him on subsequent visits to the Town Hall.

Approximately two weeks after a visit to the Town Hall, RBKC housing services allocated him a private room in a different hostel. This hostel was well set up and staff there offered a lot of guidance and support. There was 24 security and there were always four key workers onsite. About 70% of the residents were male, 30% female, housed in separate buildings, and the majority had problems with alcohol and substance abuse. It was a lot cleaner than the temporary hostels and he felt he had taken a step closer to getting out of the hostel system.

He felt much safer and stayed there for approximately six months. Throughout this time, he met with his key worker once a week. He received a lot of help and guidance and started working.

In approximately May 2017, he went with his key worker to the Town Hall, where he was allocated a room in a working hostel (residents must be employed). He was then awarded 150 housing points, given login details for the housing website and allowed to start bidding on properties. He received an extra 50 points because he was employed full time.

The fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 delayed the process somewhat and for some time, he received no updates from the housing services.

Months passed, but he was eventually able to bid successfully on a one-bedroom property and moved in there in late 2017/early 2018.

What support and advice did housing services provide?

He received no support from the housing services when he went there the first time.

Speaking to housing officers in person was like speaking to a digital programme or a computer. It was a frustrating and impersonal experience and he could not get the answers he needed.

It was only with his key worker's support that he could get any answers. He has had no contact from the housing team since he moved into his flat.

He feels there is an urgent need for more youth workers. There is no longer a youth support centre in the area and one is really needed. He has seen many young people with drug, alcohol or criminal behaviour problems change for the better with help if only they can get it.

What was the best thing or things about the process?

The best thing about the process was the first hostel where he stayed for six months. It was a very tough learning experience but also very positive. He would not be where he is now without the help he received at the hostel. Looking back, he is grateful for his time there.

Another major positive was that the hostels he stayed in were safe. The first one had 24-hour security, which was a huge bonus as some hostels are simply not safe. He has realised that there are areas and times which are not safe for young people. He and his wife have been approached and put at risk when out for an evening stroll simply because they are young.

The housing process was positive for him, but only because of his key worker's support and because of Insights.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

The worst thing about the process was the uncertainty. The timings he was promised did not match reality and waiting and not knowing was difficult. However, he said some of that was caused by the Grenfell fire, which was understandable, and he was not complaining.

Are you happy with your new home?

Very happy. He is now 25 years old, happily married and a father to a young son. They like their flat and hope to save up and be able to move to a 2-bedroom flat one day.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

He was surprised at the cost of rent at the hostels. He had to pay £180 per week to stay at the first hostel.

What advice would you give to others?

He would advise people to stay calm, positive and busy. If staying in a hostel, he advised ignoring the other residents and to focus on learning to be independent. To stay on top of your paperwork and finances and not to depend too much on your key worker.

He advised anyone going to the Town Hall to take someone with them. He felt he was taken much more seriously when he had his key worker with him. He found it hard to concentrate and remember to ask certain questions and having someone listening with him really helped.

3. Ly

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you joined the housing register?

She had been living with her baby in a property in Tooting, well outside the borough. The location was inconvenient as she was far from her family and her mother was seriously unwell.

In March 2020, she opted out of the housing system and moved back home to look after her mother. Her parents had a four-bedroom property in RBKC. She had been born in the house her parents had lived there for 40 years and had raised their four children there.

In April 2020, her mother sadly died.

Before her mother died, the family had met with RBKC housing officers to discuss the family's future options. She described her mother as a strong woman but said her father was more likely to give in to pressure, which she considered a factor in subsequent events.

In September 2020, her father moved out of the four-bedroom property he had lived in for 40 years and moved into a one-bedroom property nearby.

She and her young daughter stayed on in the four-bedroom property and she was immediately put under pressure to pay rent there. She was unemployed and caring for her one-year-old and could not afford the rent there.

She wanted to apply to become a tenant in the four-bedroom property, but this was not permitted. Her mother had been the first tenant and her father, who had vacated the property in September 2020, had been the second tenant.

In mid-October 2020, she was allocated and moved to a two-bedroom property close to her father's new property and the old family home.

This property is with the Housing Association, not the Council.

She was given £6,000 as an incentive for downsizing when she moved out of the four-bedroom property. £1,500 was retained by the Council to cover the outstanding rent at the four-bedroom property from the time her father left to her own departure. She spent the remaining £4,500 setting herself up in her new two-bedroom property, buying furniture etc.

What support and advice did housing services provide?

She felt she was not given any options. She felt pressurised to leave her family home, and she felt that all the Council wanted was to regain possession of a sought after four-bedroom property.

She did not receive advice on what she could hope to achieve in terms of a new property, such as outside space for her daughter. All she requested was a property within the borough, as she was anxious not to be placed outside the borough as before. With hindsight, she feels she was poorly advised.

What was the best thing or things about the process?

The best thing about the process was that she was able to stay in the area she grew up in and that she was allocated a property close to her father, who has struggled to cope since his wife's death. Having her family in the same area is a comfort after all she has been through.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

Poor communication from the Council was the worst part of the process. She felt they refused to work with her and ignored many of her calls and emails. She found it very hard and frustrating.

She felt the Council did not take into consideration the fact that she was only 26, despite having met the family before her mother's death. She felt the housing team took advantage of their frailty and pushed her and her father around once her mother died.

She was aware of properties that had become or were becoming available but said the housing officers would not listen to her or consider her suitability for those properties.

She felt under pressure and that she had no choice but to take what they offered her. The housing team's only objective was to get her out of the four-bedroom house. It was a very hurtful process.

The hurt is exacerbated by the fact that she is still receiving letters from the Council chasing her for money.

- Three weeks ago, she received a demand for approximately £300 for her time at the property in Tooting, which she vacated and gave up the keys for in March 2020. The Council claim they overpaid her at the time and are reclaiming the money.
- She also recently received a letter asking for her Council Tax for Sept-Oct 2020 at the four-bedroom property.

She suspects these extra costs were put to one side while the Council tried to remove her from the property and that they have only resurfaced now because they have got what they wanted.

Are you happy with your new home?

Not 100%. There is no outside space for her daughter and some of the windows are damaged and it is impossible to see out of them. However, she is glad to be close to her father and to her extended family.

She was aware at the time that better properties were available and she felt that because they had given up a large four-bedroom home, they should have been allocated better properties as some form of incentive or compensation.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She was very familiar with the housing process, but she was surprised at the lack of empathy from the housing authority. She described them as cut-throat. There was very little compassion or understanding of the family's bereavement and all the memories tied up in the family home.

The Council had committed to finding her a property and they did find her one in the area she had asked for, but she was given no choice and felt very pressurised to take it.

What advice would you give to others?

She would advise others not to rush. She feels it is very important not to give in to pressure from the Council. Individuals need to prioritise and insist upon their own needs in order to get what they want out of the process.

She commented that the problems sadly caused by Grenfell should not mean that everyone suffers. The Council should have been able to help the Grenfell survivors without it impacting so negatively on regular allocations to people on the housing register.

4. AI

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you joined the housing register?

He survived the fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 and was hospitalised for two days. His brother, who he shared a flat with in the tower, died in the tragedy. His parents and other siblings travelled to the UK from Syria to be with him and to grieve their lost son. He and his family were given rooms in a hotel where they ended up living for over a year.

Their rooms were not located next to each other and there was nowhere they could grieve together in private. When friends and other visitors came to see them, they had to receive them in the hotel lobby, with strangers watching as they expressed very private emotions. They had no cooking facilities and relied on takeaways, which had a detrimental effect on their health. His father developed diabetes.

In October 2017, the Council found him a one-bedroom flat in Kensington, which he moved into after housing for his family was organised. He is currently trying to move closer to where his family are so that he can support them better. They need help with many things, including translation, and the whole family is still grieving.

In September 2020, his flat was flooded by a leak in the ceiling and much of his furniture was damaged. There were endless delays dealing with the problem and the hole in his ceiling was only finally going to be fixed this week (February 2021). He did not have any contents insurance and received no compensation for the damage. The source of the leak has not been found and he has been told that it could happen again, which alarms him. He said it was accepted knowledge that the building has problems with its pipework. Communication from management has been consistently poor – sporadic and late.

He had to give up his job and his studies while trying to get his parents settled, but he is now working again, has just graduated and has started work on his Masters.

What support and advice did housing services provide?

Communication with the housing services was consistently difficult. He attended countless meetings and felt he was not given honest answers about what was happening. Promises were made and not kept. All he wanted was the truth, but it was not forthcoming.

What was the best thing or things about the process?

The positives from the process were that the hotel accommodation was free. They were also given an allowance to help them buy meals, which was really appreciated.

The Council also waived the rent for his first 18 months at his new flat and did the same for his parents. That was a big help.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

The poor communication from the housing services was the worst thing about the process. It was impossible to get a straight and honest answer from anyone.

They would be passed from one person to the next and, although individual officers were pleasant, no one appeared to have any authority or be able to make a decision. The process was very disorganised. He attended countless time-consuming meetings with staff and management. He feels bitter that he had to do that when he really wanted time to grieve.

Living with constant uncertainty was very hard. He and his family had to keep pushing and asking for help. No one took any initiative or approached them to offer help. He felt that if they hadn't asked, no one would have offered. The lack of privacy and the family having to live in separate hotel rooms was horrible. It worsened the grieving process for them all.

Are you happy with your new home?

No. His first impressions were positive as the building was new and the location good. His flat was also only on the 2nd floor, which reassured him and was something he had requested.

However, the flat was dirty, the building has problems and maintenance is poor. He much preferred his old flat in Grenfell Tower. He also wants to be close to his parents, who need him.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

He was surprised by the Council's lack of honesty. He met with many officers who were very pleasant and made promises but then disappeared and became uncontactable. Some were openly unhelpful. He was also surprised by endless delays for no apparent reason.

What advice would you give to others?

He would advise others to work out which person they need to speak to. To find the person who makes the decisions and not waste time being pushed from one person to another by foot soldiers with no authority or power.

5. Col

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you joined the housing register?

He had been living with his father in a 3-bedroom flat in Chelsea. He was content with the flat and had no problems with the accommodation. His father had been suffering from dementia for many years. In 2016 his father passed away and he realised that he needed to move.

He continued to live in the 3-bedroom flat for over a year after his father's death and was able to pay the rent there.

During this time, he visited the Town Hall three times and had many conversations with housing officers. He said the Grenfell tragedy in 2016 had thrown everything, including the housing system, into disarray. The housing team put pressure on him to move out quickly, but he was strong and able to resist and insist on taking his time.

He received advice from his tenant management organisation, which was helpful. They put no pressure on him to move. His sister handled all the admin around his move and assisted him throughout the process.

He viewed three flats before bidding successfully on a 1-bedroom flat, also in Chelsea.

In April 2018, he moved to his new flat.

What support and advice did housing services provide?

He had many conversations with housing officers and although he was aware of them trying to push him into making a decision that he was not ready to take, he felt they had been helpful to him.

What was the best thing or things about the process?

The best thing about the process was that it went quite quickly, which was a relief to him. He found his new home after only viewing three flats.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

The worst thing about the process was that the housing officers put pressure on him and tried to push him to move faster than he wanted to.

Are you happy with your new home?

He is very happy in his new home. With help from friends, the move went well and he is living in a nice area.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

He felt the RBKC housing officers had been kinder, more patient and more understanding than he had expected.

What advice would you give to others?

He would advise others to speak to their TMO, tenant management organisation, if applicable, to get advice and support.

6. Dot

What was your situation/what problems did you have with your accommodation when you joined the housing register?

Dot was undergoing treatment for cancer in late 2017. One day while visiting the hospital for treatment, she suffered side effects from the chemotherapy and collapsed. She was in a coma for some time and her outlook was so bleak that her next of kin were told that she would not survive.

She did survive, but she is very vulnerable and her lifestyle is extremely restricted as a result. In addition to the cancer, she has many other medical problems and is suffering from depression.

Since 2015, she has been living in privately rented accommodation in Kensington on an annually renewable contract. She has a good relationship with her landlord but realised after her near-death experience that she needs more security in order to feel safe. She does not want to leave the area as she has her family and friends there.

She joined the housing register in early 2018.

During 2018 and 2019, she was sent no properties to view. She was required to submit a lot of paperwork, including doctors' certificates and lists of medication, in order to complete her application and prove her eligibility. She has had to re-submit this paperwork two or three times as it was either misplaced or lost, which was time-consuming and difficult.

In early 2020, two years after joining the register, they finally started to send her details of properties.

She has yet not seen a property to suit her needs. There was one that might have been suitable, but pets were not allowed and she could not bear to be parted from her dog.

She has been encouraged to go into sheltered housing, but again no dogs are allowed and she feels it would be like living in a prison.

All she wants is to find a home close to her friends and family where she can live with her dog and feel safe and secure until she dies.

What support and advice did housing services provide?

The housing register staff that she spoke to when she first registered were extremely friendly and pleasant, but the truth is that nothing has come of it.

They suggested she went into sheltered housing, but she was very much against it. She has a horror of having to share items like washing machines with other people, and apart from anything else, they did not allow dogs. She was also concerned that it would not be as easy for her son to visit her there.

What was the best thing or things about the process?

There has been nothing good about it so far.

What was the worst thing or things about the process?

Her mental health has suffered due to the uncertainty and the very long wait. She said she was depressed and said that in addition to her other medical needs, she is taking anti-depressants. Her health continues to deteriorate while she waits.

The process is very rigid. Each individual has to go and see the properties and then bid and there is no leeway. She spends almost all her time alone at home, and she would not have been able to visit any properties without help from her ex-husband and her son, who have been able to drive her.

She has witnessed neighbours get properties within six months of starting the process, and she thinks luck must play a part in it all. She finds it hard getting her hopes up each week, only to have them dashed again.

Was there something about the process that surprised you or you were not expecting?

She had expected to be able to move within a year and a half of joining the housing register. She had no idea it was going to take so long – and there is still no end in sight.

What advice would you give to others?

She had no advice to give, except to say that perhaps it would be good for people to know that luck is a factor in the process. And not to expect fairness.

c. Reports from the Fieldworkers

Three fieldworkers were recruited locally with the support of the Council's labour brokerage team. The fourth fieldworker was already an employee. They worked on carrying out telephone surveys throughout February and March 2021. All four fieldworkers found the telephone survey work challenging and distressing. They received training from NewmanFrancis and support from a team leader and each other. Weekly team meetings quickly became platforms for debriefs and talking through emotional responses to the work. At this point, final debriefs are yet to be held. Their four reports speak for themselves.

Laila

Thoughts before and after the survey work

Before starting the survey, I naively thought that the purpose of the survey would help to make a fairer housing allocation scheme (as it was written on the Council's website). I thought it would be a simple survey to allow people to engage with the Council and have a positive impact on the housing allocation scheme. I thought people would be enthusiastic about it and be willing to do it.

Sadly, many people did not understand it. Sometimes because of the language barrier, or because the purpose of it was not always clear and because of the complexity of the housing issues it covered. People mainly needed help and support and expected us to help them.

Afterwards, I started to wonder what the purpose of the survey was, and I felt that it was giving people false hope. The Council knows that the primary solution is to have far more housing, which they say they cannot deliver.

On the negative side-the housing issues will obviously not be solved by a survey, so why carry out a survey as if it will improve the housing situation?

Positively, it allowed people to express themselves and be heard. Above all, it has to improve the services provided by the Council.

The process

I thought that the Survey did not seem important enough to the Council because it was not promoted as much as necessary and the way it was initially communicated was not appropriate. Most people did not understand why they were receiving a letter. It was easier with the second letter being accompanied by the leaflet, but it came late. Covid was a priority, but improving the housing allocation scheme to help people to get housed is so urgent, especially in the current context.

Problems identified

The most common problem people were facing in terms of housing, include:

- the huge issue of TA (length of waiting, no rights, not secure or stable, too expensive, far from schools or community support etc.)
- the incredible length of waiting
- poor living conditions in the accommodations (dampness, mould, safety issues etc.)
- overcrowded housing
- the desperate bidding system
- lack of options or flexibility
- the complexity of the housing system

Surprises

I was shocked by the huge impact the Council can have on people's lives. People were more comfortable talking to us (NewmanFrancis) because we were independent, as they did not trust the Council. Even after reassuring them that we were independent, I felt that some people were concerned that the survey would have an impact on their housing.

From hearing people's reports of their situations, I think that the Council is acting like a Kafkaesque administration where the staff are hidden behind an incomprehensible and rigid administration, creating a sense of distress, discomfort, and a nightmare for people. The Council can look like an all-powerful administration with the power to arbitrarily make people happy or unhappy by granting housing or not in good conditions or not, whereas it should be a fundamental right.

By dehumanising people, by considering them as impersonal figures to be managed quickly and efficiently, the Council participates, consciously or unconsciously, in a form of oppression. But the suffering of those interviewed is real and depending on their personalities and circumstances; it has resulted in fear, worry, anxiety, frustration, defeatist attitude, misunderstandings, anger, patience, pessimism, suspicion, hopelessness, sadness, disgust, desperate, not listened to, disrespected and a loss of dignity.

Many people are facing shocking issues such as the incredible length of waiting time in TA, some appalling conditions (health and mental issues, disabilities, living conditions, overcrowded, safety issues, poverty, violence...) and their circumstances seem not to be considered against the criteria. Circumstances very often exacerbated by the pandemic. What is more shocking is the lack of consideration of the interests of children. Children should be at the heart of any decision made. The majority of people that I talked to are not satisfied by the Council; many families or single people are suffering because of their housing situation. I did not expect that our work would dig as deeply as we did into personal stories; I did not expect so many negative experiences.

Learning

I have learned that the system is not flexible and it is difficult to understand, especially when there is a lack of information provided. I was not expecting to hear about such huge and deep-rooted issues concerning housing in RBKC going back over decades.

Most people were not aware of what points are available and how they are allocated. They were not aware of their rights. Sometimes it is even harder for people who do not speak English as a first language to navigate the system.

I did not expect the Council to allow this open survey, which is positive as it is completely transparent. But I hope that it does not make the housing allocation scheme even more difficult for people in the end.

Finally, I realised that the Council's information is not clear and that people are not listened to by the Council; which leads to a hazy and confusing system where people think that the system is arbitrary, creating competition between people and a lot of rumours, true or false.

Personal impact

I found this work stressful and exhausting because it was hard to hear all these personal stories, these broken lives, and such harsh experiences. I did not expect it to go that far. I was unprepared and uncomfortable listening to the private stories of people who spoke to me, hoping or expecting help.

I also felt powerless. It was very frustrating for me to just listen and not come up with any solutions other than sending information and contacts or reporting the worst cases to my manager. I tried to give people my full attention and maintain constant empathy because they had a huge need to be

listened to and considered. As I went along, I would tell people right away that there was nothing I could do for them but that they had to keep hope and stay strong.

At first, I was very shocked by each story, but then I started to compare cases and tell myself that those that were not in an extreme case were ultimately not in such a bad position! I had to remember that no! All of these situations are neither acceptable nor normal! I dare not imagine how the staff who have worked there for years had to toughen themselves up to no doubt maintain a sort of therapeutic distance like certainly all professions confronted with human misery and suffering.

I was very angry and upset and needed to share my feelings. The weekly meetings with our team allowed us to talk and share our experiences. My manager was always available and listening to us. Our team exchanges were, therefore, necessary and important.

I thought it was not normal that so many families were so affected in their lives because of their housing situation, and that should not be happening in such a wealthy city nowadays. RBKC should therefore take its responsibilities seriously and act accordingly, whether towards applicants or staff.

Personal positives

The only thing I enjoyed was that we were respecting people's voices and allow them to share their views. We have also tried to provide helpful information.

Changes needed

The Council should take the time, listen to people and consider their different needs and circumstances. They should stop being so rigid even when talking to them and show more empathy. This policy should come from the top management and be a priority. They should keep the term social in mind in their relationship with people and remember that accidents of life can happen to anyone and most people would avoid the Council if they had the choice. The purpose of the Council is to provide help and support to people in need.

The staff should also be taken into consideration and be listened to because they are human being dealing with very difficult issues (it might already be the case). They need to be properly trained and be prepared to support people, especially those with extreme cases. It is important not to trivialize the narratives of people's lives by them becoming normal or usual to hear and then normal for the staff who should be supported to keep a caring attitude to people.

Public meetings should be held where people can come together to talk and interact with housing managers and get answers about the housing system. It could help people to feel considered and respected, to stop suspicion and to rebuild a relationship of trust. Perhaps the Council should encourage and develop a community of solidarity rather than a competitive one. It should also encourage the community to work with the Council to find housing solutions and develop a system of solidarity within the Council.

If I could change one thing

The only thing would be the customer service, but ideally, it would be to fix the problem of supply of social housing.

Finally

I hope that the result of the survey will make changes for the better.

Thoughts before and after the survey work

My thoughts before we started the project were that it's going to be a simple and easy survey and I expected to hear lots of positive feedback due to RBKC being such a wealthy area.

Once the interview process started, I was shocked to find out what situations people are in and especially how long they have been on waiting lists to get back into the Borough.

I was also very surprised to find out how applicants were treated by staff. Almost all of them felt insignificant and felt they had no support with their cases and were never contacted with any updates.

The process

I think the survey was well written and most people found it easy to understand the questions and had lots of views to share with me.

We probably could have got more feedback and participation if we were able to go outside to do surveys, but the circumstances didn't allow for this.

Problems identified

The most common problem was the amount of waiting time in TA. People felt neglected and without any support system, plus people in TA suffered from never being able to make their home their own.

Shocks

What shocked me the most is how grateful people were just to speak to someone who has time for them. Furthermore, the conditions people are currently living in, in this day and age, are appalling. Mould and unsafe housing and property that's unsuitable for their needs. Also, I couldn't believe the average waiting time in TA is 12 years - that's the whole childhood for a child.

Learning

What I learned from the survey is the general dissatisfaction of almost everyone with the way they have been treated. I actually did not expect to find such a huge number of issues as I considered RBKC a great Borough to live in.

Personal impact

The work was a lot more personal and emotional than I expected it to be. I had people contact me over and over again, asking for help as they said no one else really bothered to help them with their issues. I felt really helpless and angry.

It's mentally draining to hear all the stories of people's suffering from mental health, overcrowding and poverty. Also, extremely sad as a mother to hear how the children of those people have been affected in negative ways, from having to travel far to school to living in places where they didn't feel safe.

Personal positives

I enjoyed working on this project that will hopefully lead to some positive changes in the system. I also liked being in a team that cared about people and was passionate about what we are doing. I liked speaking to people and at least listening to their problems, even if most times I couldn't help.

Changes needed

The Council definitely needs to work on their communication with people. More letters and calls to check on tenants.

They probably need more and better-trained staff as there are so many people on the register with such diverse needs.

Also, properties need to be accessed annually to make sure they are in good order.

If I could change one thing

I would focus first on better customer care. There needs to be respect for the tenants and good communication - they should have someone they can voice their concerns to. From that, starts the build-up of trust and a better relationship. Even when you can't change things, you can always listen and advise.

Finally

I think for the Council to achieve better results, there needs to be a radical change in the system. It needs to run like a professional business. Otherwise, it will only get worse. There needs to be an emphasis on making staff more educated and happier in their workspace so that they can pass that on to the clients. There need to be rules about property standards and upkeep, so properties are not written off. The bidding process also needs to be re-examined as most people seem to think it's either not effective or rigged.

Thoughts before and after the survey work

Before starting the survey, I was confident I would be able to make a positive impact on the tenants' lives. I was enthusiastic about the idea of contributing to the development of my community. But soon, I realised that I could potentially make the life of these tenants worse by giving false hope and oversimplifying the solutions made available to them in terms of rehousing within the borough.

The process

I don't believe the survey was the best option. Although it was an opportunity for informed decision making, it was too directed into one direction favouring the Council's decisions over tenants' right to choose.

Problems identified

The most common problem the people I interviewed faced was the sentiment of feeling abandoned by the Council. The second was that there was little or no communication with people. I spoke to a tenant that didn't know she could bid for permanent accommodation, another tenant who was awarded 150 points whilst she suffers from schizophrenia.

Surprises

During my work experience, I was shocked that tenants were left in TA for years without any support from the Council. An accommodation initially temporarily became a trap for many. Many tenants are living in fear and some are suicidal. The most shocking thing was the lack of clear communication from the Council as well as a lack of customer care.

Learning

I learnt how the points-based system works, its benefits and flaws. I would have wished the survey to be less subjective and have more open questions where tenants would be able to express themselves. I would want to have fewer questions to allow opinions to be heard and ideas to flourish.

Personal impact

I felt stressed and hopeless, at times frustrated for not being able to do much. I internalised the trauma of the tenants and I didn't know any safe place or people to go to for healing. Not that my manager and co-workers weren't helpful, but I believe dealing with trauma needs to be addressed by trained professionals.

Personal positives

I was able to capture people's emotions and put their experience truthfully onto paper.

Changes needed

I believe the legacy of Grenfell will always haunt us. The Council shouldn't expect to have a greater relationship with people. I think it's wrong to think or assume we will forget what happened and the failure of the Council in offering safe accommodations. Treating people with respect and dignity is the most important thing regardless of their gender, race, social background, ability, religion or sexual orientation. The Council should listen to the messages in the survey and act upon them.

If I could change one thing

If I had the power to change things on behalf of RBKC, it would include changes to legislation. I would remove many current housing policies: end bedroom tax, make it hard to buy a Council property, make a cap to rents within the borough and increase home swap scheme availability. I would also encourage private landlords to accept tenants with DSS.

I would start afresh with tenants with complex needs in my mind. Inclusion is key. In addition, I would retrain current staff and offer them training in unconscious bias and healing from trauma.

Finally

I would like tenant organisations and citizen initiatives to know more about the Council's plan and choose themselves and appoint an organisation with whom they will work alongside them.

One of the suggestions I would like to make is to give tenants living in TA the opportunity to form an organisation where the members will have a right to veto important decisions made by the Council at each housing policy meeting.

Thoughts before and after the survey work

Before beginning the outreach work and surveying RBKC housing applicants, I anticipated the project would be mainly geared around minor tweaks and frustrations that residents had with RBKC's Housing Allocation Scheme.

Being aware of the major housing and homelessness crisis facing not just RBKC nor London but the entire nation, I didn't think the outreach would be easy-going. However, I couldn't have anticipated just how many calls I would have with people that would result in such emotional, distressful and harrowing conversations.

So many people I interviewed were worn down, tired, depressed, angry, defeated and for a plethora of reasons. From horrid property conditions to over a decade wait times in TA to being hung up on by RBKC staff to overcrowding to being placed out of the Borough and felt they'd been 'completely forgotten about'. The sheer number of negative stories, experiences and hardships I heard from people across literally every single aspect of their experience in RBKC Housing was something I hadn't expected at all.

The process

The survey was relatively easy to carry out and most people were able to respond with insightful answers to all questions when interviewed. One minor criticism of carrying out Question 1, the survey question ranking the points on the current HAS as being higher, lower or about right, would be that when I interviewed people who weren't at all familiar with the points categories, explaining this lengthy priority points table over the phone proved to be quite challenging at times.

A few people complained about the lack of scope of some of the survey/interview questions, but as our project was solely aimed at RBKC's HAS, I simply had to remind residents the focus of our outreach was that.

Problems identified

The most reoccurring issue that presented itself when I was interviewing people was wait times. Excessive wait times. This was expressed predominantly by people waiting in TA but also was brought up by overcrowded families in permanent housing too. Without neglecting any other mentioned issues/themes from the outreach work, the number of complaints, conversations and suggestions I had from people about wait times was by far the most common.

Many people suggested RBKC's HAS should allocate points for how many years residents have been waiting in TA, while others simply stated that there should just be a threshold whereby anyone reaching that length of time should have to be housed. So many people I interviewed expressed these views.

Surprises

There were a number of things that shocked me working on this project and that will stay with me for a long time.

The absolute lack of transparent mature communication with residents. The lack of proper living conditions for so many families – many with small children playing in houses plastered in black mould. People being moved out-of-borough into TA and feeling 'forgotten' by RBKC, non-existent support/advice from RBKC and proper customer service and basic decencies like not hanging up on residents. I couldn't wrap my head around the fact that while the lack of housing, land, funding and therefore ability to house RBKC residents is completely out of caseworkers hands, treating people with dignity, respect and kindness is not.

Akin to how my team's and my hands were quite tightly tied regarding our ability to bring about immediate change/impact for residents when they complained directly to us, we did what we could do. We listened, empathised and advised when and how we could. It wasn't much, but it was what so many people we interviewed needed, someone to speak to. Someone to hear them. The way RBKC staff treat people we interviewed was the second most shocking thing for me on this project.

The singular aspect that shocked me the most would be the length of time some applicants have spent waiting in TA.

I spoke to an RBKC resident who had been waiting 18 years in TA for permanent housing. That is two thirds as many years as I am old. I simply couldn't, and still cannot, imagine spending 18 years waiting in a temporary property, waiting to be able to properly start building your life. I'm still left in awe whenever I ponder this residents' last 18 years and potentially however many more they have left to wait.

Learning

I learnt that a significantly small cohort of people are satisfied with RBKC Housing and its Housing Allocation Scheme. The overwhelming majority of people were beyond dissatisfied, frustrated and hopeless in the face of acquiring permanent housing in RBKC.

I didn't expect such a significant proportion of people we interviewed to be this negative about RBKC and its Housing Allocation Scheme, as I hadn't anticipated just how bad things were for people on the Housing Register. Moreover, I also didn't expect people to have been, and still being, treated so badly by RBKC staff through verbal abuse, hanging up, bouncing people between departments and alleged racism.

On a positive note, a few interactions I had with residents taught me something about people. A resident I spoke to was one of the most positive and driven people I've ever spoken to in my life. A single parent of three who works and has a 5-year financial plan to work their way into the private rented sector and provide for their children while inspiring them to be the best that they can be, without any family or friends to support them in their distant TA. I did not expect to find out that even in some of the worst circumstances, people are able to be so motivated, positive and inspiring.

Personal impact

The work was far more personal and hard-hitting than I had anticipated it to be. I had a handful of people that got back in contact with me after our initial interview to try and get their voice/complaints/issues heard in RBKC's Housing department. Something that I could only aid them in by referring their case/name to RBKC Housing department and hoping that it was followed up from there. This sense of near-complete powerlessness was extremely frustrating for me personally and emotionally because it was evident that these people saw me as their best possible opportunity, and I couldn't fulfil this for them.

The fact that multiple residents saw me as the best possible option to have their issues heard at RBKC Housing department is in and of itself extremely saddening; as they were well aware, I was an out-sourced, third-party researcher not directly connected to RBKC in any way. This sense of desperation from so many people I interviewed was harrowing.

My most impactful interaction came when a resident became extremely distressed and suicidal on the phone to me. They left their apartment and began walking to a location they were describing to me on the phone. I spent nearly half an hour trying to calm this person down, talking them out of suicide and promising them that things would get better.

Again, I had no way of knowing if things would get better. I had absolutely no power to help this person besides referring them to RBKC's mental health emergency response team – which I'm sure did a great job in support. However, I again felt so powerless in this situation which seemed quite literally to be life or death. This experience had a significant emotional impact on me and I still sometimes wonder if they are alive today.

Personal positives

Engaging with residents, listening to their problems and helping in any which way possible, however slight in consequence it was. While our ability to significantly impact the situations of those we were speaking to was minimal, there were times when simply listening to residents' problems and talking it through meant the world to them. And they told me this. These were the types of moments I enjoyed because I felt as though I was helping improve their day, even if just for a second.

Additionally, meeting so many inspiring and strong residents through not just interviews but the resident Focus Groups and the Community Advisory Board.

I have nothing but admiration for the wealth of resilience among so many residents, their determination, activism and commitment to not suffering in silence but shouting loudly to help not just themselves but everyone in the Borough. It was great to work alongside such inspiring people.

Changes needed

RBKC needs to communicate with residents more regularly. Via phone call, house visit, letter and email.

They just need to have an effective and continual dialogue with housing register applicants whereby applicants are kept up to date with their application, bidding position, wait times and policy and scheme changes/introductions in RBKC.

Keeping people in the know is imperative to ensuring that residents trust RBKC and its Housing Department. Building this trust through transparent, open and constant communication that's kept up to date will be the first major building block in realigning the Council / resident dynamic in RBKC and improving this relationship.

RBKC should also offer its workers formal trauma training and customer service/support training. The range and severity of situations that RBKC workers must have to face on a daily basis, and have done for years and years, most definitely demands that they be properly prepared and supported to ensure they can be as effective as possible in their roles. Doing so will have the knock-on effect of improving the quality of service and customer care for all RBKC Housing Register applicants as workers will be more efficient in understanding, aiding and supporting residents.

If I could change one thing

I would immediately direct all focus on acquiring more properties across the Borough and freeing up larger properties as quickly as possible. I would focus on acquiring more properties through building and purchase.

However, more importantly, I would address the management structure of property allocation priority and downsizing in RBKC. I would ensure that downsizing is prioritised as moving residents out of oversized properties frees up their current home so an overcrowded family can move in and then a third smaller household can move into the property that the overcrowded family had previously been occupying.

By targeting downsizing first and foremost, a successful downsizing move for an RBKC resident would result in three households being placed in adequate housing in the Borough, instantly tripling the impact an RBKC Housing department workers' time has on those in severe housing need.

Finally

Considering we were unaware of the true extent of the lack of trust and openness from residents towards RBKC, I think we could've sent more communications and publicised the project earlier and to try and entice more people to commit to surveys/interview/focus groups. However, considering we managed to exceed our target of reaching 250 people, this is only a way we could've included even more people in our survey from the outset.

Also, had we known what we know now about the severe circumstances and conditions so many people are living in, we most definitely would've compiled our list of 'helpful organisations, charities and agencies' that we sent to residents in week 3 of interviews prior to starting the outreach surveys/interviews.

RBKC need to ensure that residents are not waiting in TA for 12 / 14 / 16 and 18+ years. They should introduce structures that mean residents are not able to live in TA for such extended periods of time. Whether this is dealt with using points, a threshold or an alternative method, I do not know. But I believe residents should not be living in TA for anywhere near this number of years. Wait times need to be recognised as a contributing factor for allocation.

Moreover, I think RBKC needs to re-write its points categories on the housing allocation scheme to better reflect the cohort of RBKC residents on the Housing Register. RBKC needs to recognise residents' ties to the area and award points for circumstances, such as length of time lived in the Borough, family support, community service, long-term jobs, children's education and hidden disability needs of residents and their children.

I think RBKC needs to formally train their housing department and all its workers in trauma and customer service/outreach support. RBKC also need to improve their level of communication to residents, keeping them

in the know. Doing so will significantly improve the service these RBKC workers can offer residents on the Housing Register. Doing so will instantly improve the experience for residents and the relationship between RBKC and residents too.

I believe RBKC also need to ensure they're carrying out regular (annual) checks on their properties to ensure they are maintained to adequate living standard and if not, they should ensure they're brought up to standard rather than left to deteriorate. Both for the short-term impact of the health of the tenants but also the long-term consequence of losing a Council property due to being uninhabitable from lack of upkeep over several years.

Finally, I believe RBKC need to introduce a formal mental health outreach scheme or dedicated team for residents. What reoccurred a lot for me through my outreach work was the discussion of the impacts on residents' mental health the housing process has had on them. Notably, many felt defeated and unable to even bid for properties or ring RBKC to enquire about their application/bidding position as they'd been worn down after years of trying. It's imperative that RBKC recognise the need for far greater mental health support among its registered residents and begins to offer it.