

Neighbourhood Housing Consultation

We are reviewing how tenants and leaseholders access the Council's housing services because the way residents are using our services is changing, with fewer people coming into our neighbourhood housing offices.

At the same time, the Government has announced a one per cent reduction in rent for social housing tenants. Rents help us provide the services you need. The reduction means we need to improve the efficiency of our services and find the savings to cover the imposed shortfall.

Our overall objective is to provide you with a high-quality, lower cost, and more efficient housing service, which also reflects and responds to the changing ways residents are choosing to access those services.

The proposals aim to offer you a service that provides:

- More self-service and online services for quicker any-time access and staff to support you to use these
- More integrated working, with the antisocial behaviour and resident participation teams working alongside housing teams
- Estate officers with the tools to bring housing services to you
- An improved, housing counter service at Christopher Addison House behind the Town Hall with trained officers to deal with any multiple and complex housing issues.

To deliver these improvements and make the required savings, we are proposing to:

- Reduce the number of neighbourhood housing offices from six to three
- Expand these remaining offices, including an improved housing counter service at Christopher Addison House
- Make more housing services available online
- Provide self-service terminals in the proposed housing hubs and at libraries around the borough
- Provide estate officers with the technology and training to do mobile working –so they can bring housing services to you.

When thinking about these proposals and alternative options there are important 'trade-offs' (a set of compromises) to consider.

We are running this consultation because we want to know what you think of the proposals; how you think they will affect you; and whether you think any other options should be considered.

Please take the time to read the proposals in more detail below and then tell us what you think by completing the attached survey.

Why are we proposing these changes?

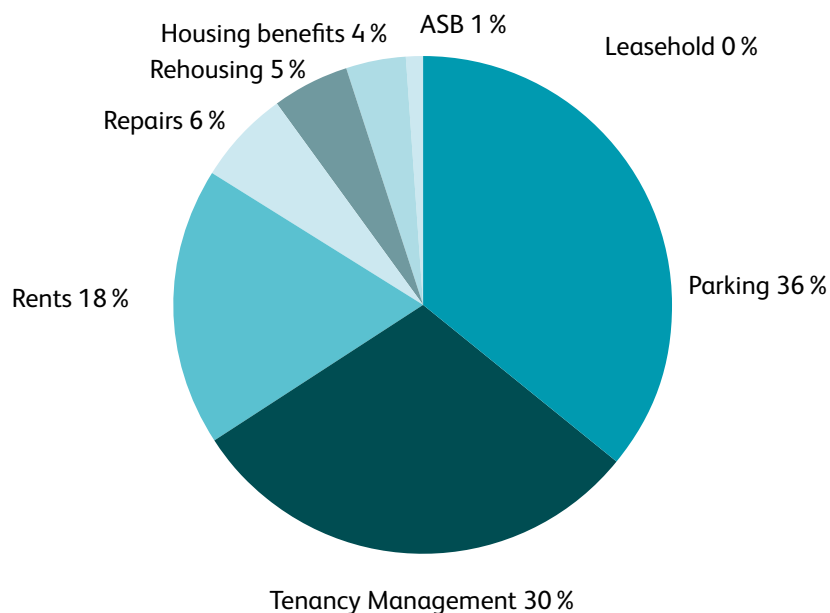
The overall number of residents visiting neighbourhood housing offices over the last three years has declined. The table below shows the number of visits for each neighbourhood housing office. In most cases, the number of visits has declined.

Neighbourhood Housing Office	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Homerton	12306	11469	9199
North East (Clock House)	8172	7517	9057
North West (Stoke Newington)	4494	5050	4991
Shoreditch	3756	2796	1761
Queensbridge (De Beauvoir)	9600	6285	7254
Total	38328	33117	32262

(Data collected from housing offices by financial year).

We have also collected data on the purpose of the visits. The chart below shows the majority of residents visit to buy parking permits, pay rent and get information about their tenancy.

(Data collected by housing offices from December 2014 to December 2015)



Many residents are visiting housing offices for services that can be provided online or through self-service terminals. Enhancing and investing in these could reduce the number of visits even further.

In April 2016 we conducted surveys at Homerton neighbourhood housing office, asking visitors how they might like to access services in future. The majority (consistently between 59-64 per cent) said they would like to do the following online or through self-service terminals: view rent statements; pay for parking permits; request repairs; report antisocial behaviour; request and track rehousing requests; and access information on housing benefit.

The findings from the surveys and declining visitor numbers raises questions about whether six neighbourhood housing offices are the best use of office space and Council resource. The Council is therefore proposing to make some changes, these are outlined below.

A closer look at the proposals:

Better use of office space – housing hubs proposal:

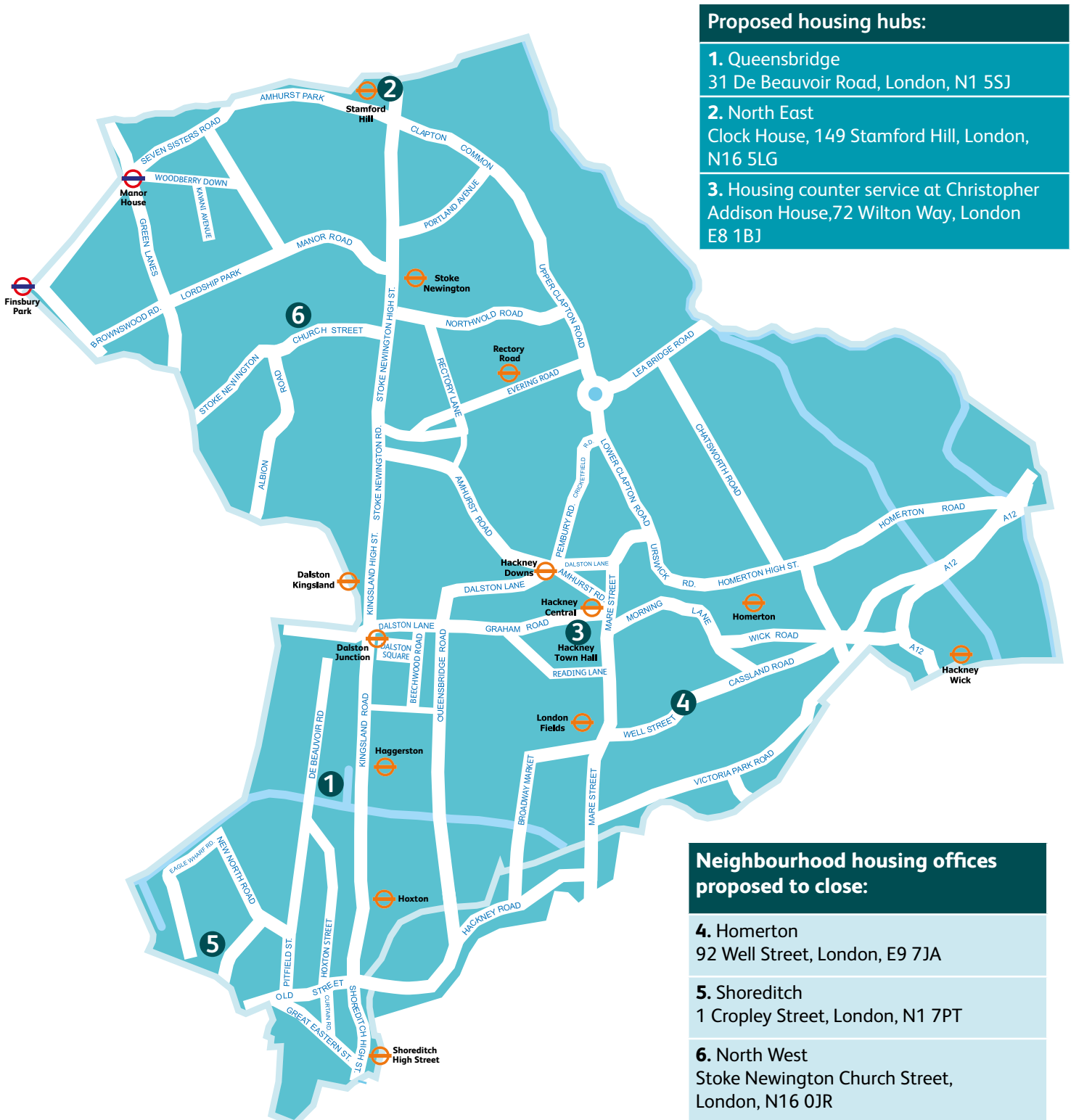
The Council is proposing to reduce the number of neighbourhood housing offices from six to three and rename them 'housing hubs' to reflect the enhanced range of services they would provide. One of these would be a counter service at Christopher Addison House (behind the Town Hall).

This will generate savings as fewer buildings will reduce running costs. This means we can retain similar staff numbers to offer an improved face-to-face service at the remaining hubs and at Christopher Addison House.

Antisocial behaviour and resident participation teams will also be available at the housing hubs, making them a one-stop-shop for your housing needs. The housing counter service at Christopher Addison House will also make it easier for you to access other Council services and discuss more complex housing needs.

We understand not everyone wants to go online or use self-service terminals, and that closing offices will impact some residents, especially those who do not have internet access or have mobility difficulties.

That's why we want to keep three housing hubs – one in the north and one in the south of the borough - as well as the additional housing counter service at Christopher Addison House in the centre of Hackney, where there are good transport links. The map below shows which we are proposing to close, and which ones we are considering converting into housing hubs:



Finding a compromise:

If the Council does not reduce the number of housing offices, we will have to make savings in other ways. This will most likely mean reducing staffing levels, which could result in a decrease in the quality of service. If savings are not found, other planned proposals (outlined below) may also be limited.

In summary, compromises needs to be made:

The compromises – positive and negative trade-offs:

Reduce the number of housing offices to three housing hubs. This means:

Better face-to-face service at the enhanced hubs.

Savings can be used to provide self-service terminals and improve online services

More mobile working with smartphones and tablets (handheld computers) for estate officers, meaning the can take housing services to residents

But...

We understand not everyone wants to go online or use self-service terminals, and that closing offices will impact some residents, especially those who do not have internet access or have mobility difficulties.

Residents living near closed housing offices will have to travel further.

OR

Keep the same number of housing offices. This means:

Residents living near the offices we are proposing to close will still have a local office

But...

Savings will have to be found elsewhere – most likely by reducing staff

A possible decrease in the quality of the service due to reduced staff levels

Fewer savings, which would limit proposed improvements to online services and self-service.

Improve and move more services online:

Benefits?

- Improve online services to reflect increasing usage and demand
- Any-time access to housing services
- Buy parking permits and pay your rent online without having to visit an office
- A personalised service – log and track service requests, track bills and make payments. This will make it easier for you and staff to deal with your requests.

Negatives?

- Not everyone has access to the internet or feels comfortable using it
- Some residents will feel more reassured resolving an issue face-to-face with a specialist.

How can we reduce the negatives?

- Staff will be retained at the housing hubs, so face-to-face support is still available.
- Staff at the housing hubs will be trained to help you get set up and use online services
- Self-service terminals will be provided around various sites in Hackney to enable those without the internet to access housing services without having to visit a housing hub.
- With three housing hubs, more staff will be on hand to do mobile working – allowing the Council to take housing services to residents and/or teach them how to use online services

Self-service terminals

We are proposing to provide self-service terminals in the proposed housing hubs and at Homerton and Stoke Newington libraries.

Benefits?

- Make rent and service charge payments
- Print rent statements, tenant succession forms and information on right to buy
- A reduction in the time you wait to see an officer, as visitors can use the self-service terminals instead
- Proposed terminals at Homerton and Stoke Newington libraries mean local residents without access to the internet can still access services without the need to visit a hub
- More staff available to deal with other requests quickly and/or engage in mobile working on estates due to less face-to-face demand.

Are there any negatives?

- Some residents will feel more reassured resolving an issue face-to-face with a specialist

How can we reduce the negatives?

- Staff will be helping you to use self-service terminals.
- A face-to-face service will still be available at the housing hubs.
- If the number of housing offices are reduced, more staff will be available to help you access services online, so you can access services 24/7.

Estate officers improvement (bringing staff to you)

By reducing the number of offices, we will be able to equip our estate staff with tablets (hand-held computers). This will allow them to bring most office-based and online services to residents at home or on estates, reducing the need to visit a housing hub.

Benefits?

- Estate officers can bring housing services to you
- The tablets will enable staff to track a resident's journey from their initial enquiry and have a better understanding of their problems and recent history
- Better informed officers will provide a better and faster service for you

Negatives?

- To provide more estate officers and equip them with tablets, we will have to reduce the number of neighbourhood housing offices in order to retain the staff and make the savings
- You will still have to ask an estate officer to visit you, or wait for them to come to you.

How can we reduce the negatives?

- Estate officers will aim to respond to your request within five working days
- Prearranged meetings can be arranged at the housing hubs
- Estate officers will be helping you to set up and use the online services and self-service terminals, reducing the need to call them out or visit a housing hub
- Housing hubs will still provide face-to-face services.