

## POVERTY



Hackney Council

## Tackling Poverty & Inequalities through System Convening

**Two new roles and an approach to tackling poverty and inequalities, built on the learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic of the need to work differently with council colleagues, health and community partners.**

In September 2022, Hackney Council hired two ‘System Conveners,’ roles that were the first of their kind in the council. They came on the heels of the Council’s Poverty Reduction Framework that outlined as a priority the need to work differently to respond to the material needs of poverty and act preventatively.

During the pandemic Hackney, like many other councils, worked together with community and health partners in new ways to support residents most impacted by the pandemic. The System Conveners roles have been a way to acknowledge that learning and create roles specifically designed to continue working in a connected way.

### The System Conveners’ First Steps

The initial brief to the two System Conveners was to ‘get out there’-- be in the community meeting with organisations and council colleagues.

They began working within some of the networks that already existed– community navigators, the food network, the advice partnership. In these spaces, they sought to understand what the worries were, where

resources could be pooled, and what insight from the ground they could surface and feed back to the system.

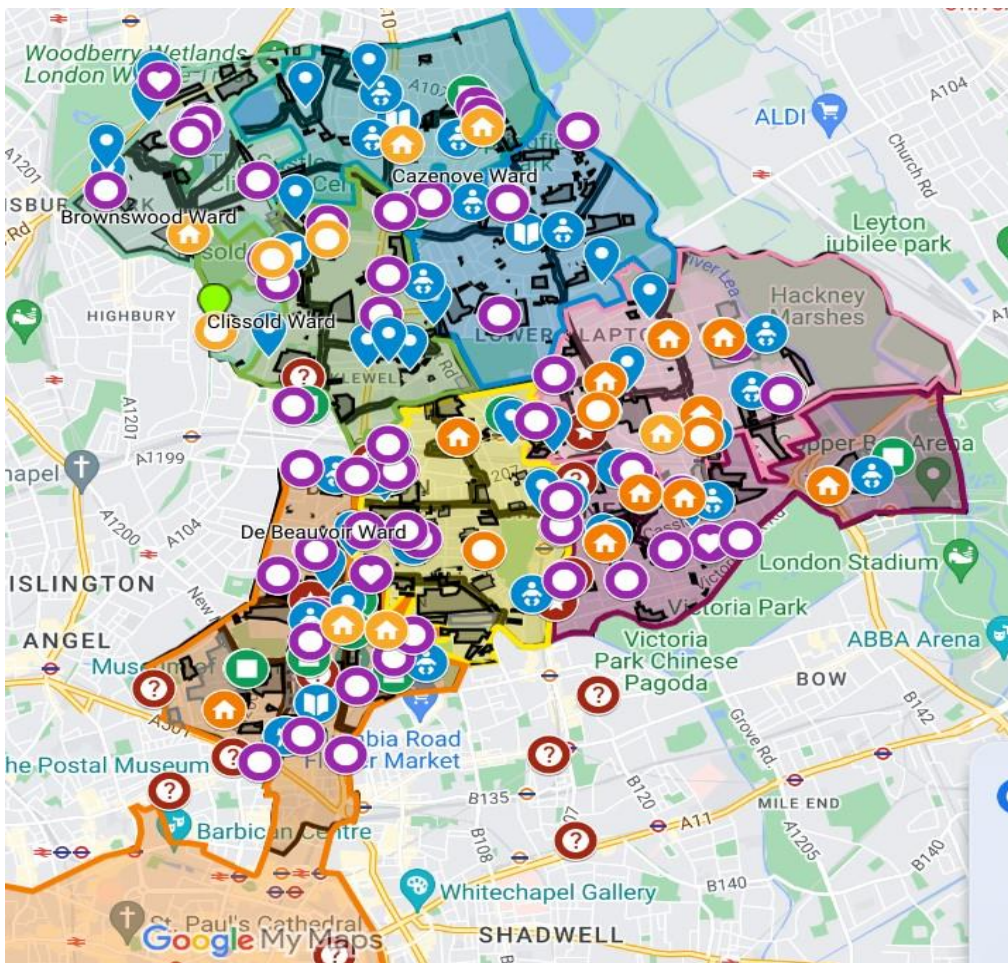
They were tasked with not having an agenda beyond trying to understand what someone needed or who/what was getting stuck in the system. When opportunities arose, like the Warm Hubs initiative, they would provide modelling, introductions, and even challenges.

They took the following approach to visiting local partners:

- **Get Involved** - do not observe passively, talk to the people attending the service, ask if there is anything you can do to help.
- **Be Open** - try not to have a set of questions you need answered. Be flexible and listen. You will learn more about that organisation and the way they approach their work.
- **Have a Warm Introduction**- if someone trusted introduces you, you can build bonds more quickly

In the first week a community partner said to the conveners that ‘the Council’ usually visits their service in a smart shirt and lanyard, hiding behind a clipboard with a set of pre ordained questions making it hard to connect with them or express the value of their work.

System Conveners have the opportunity to go out to our partners and listen without an agenda and try to form meaningful relationships with those organisations.



Map of services across Hackney that the System Conveners developed.



People-centred councils  
driving social innovation  
putting people first

E: [comms@councils.coop](mailto:comms@councils.coop) | T: [@CoopInnovation](https://www.coopinnovation.org) | W: [councils.coop](http://councils.coop)

Beyond building relationships, the system conveners have also been building understanding of who and what the system is composed of. In many spaces, the conveners have been hearing pleas for a directory: “If we only had a list of services to refer residents to!”

However, they knew that any list would be out of date as soon as it was published. Instead, they started building an internal map of the system– the borough’s wards, the housing estates, the GP practices, health and care neighbourhoods, the advice providers, food organisations, and other local charities. They would use this map to understand who is nearby one another and where connections between organisations and people could be strengthened in a local, place-based way.

### **System convening 18 months into the journey**

Over the first year and a half of the System Conveners’ work, they’ve done some of the following:

- Connecting colleagues around housing– Working with the Council Housing service to deliver advice sessions in community and health settings while uncovering some of the recurrent housing issues that people continuously face.
- Supported the 13 council funded Warm Hubs and brought the evaluation of that work to our colleagues in Public Health for their work on ‘Social Isolation’.
- Hosting the Hackney Food Network, a coalition of those working to address Food Poverty in Hackney.
- Meeting with residents, partners in the VCS, Health and Council colleagues to understand the needs of families living in Temporary Accommodation and looking to co-produce ways to support them.
- Supporting our 24 Community Infrastructure Organisations, who have received core funding from the council for three years in recognition of the holistic approach to supporting residents and their trusted role in communities puts them in a vital position to work preventatively.

### **Not just a role, but a wider approach**

We also view convening as a responsibility for the whole Policy and Strategic Delivery team. For instance, since July 2022 our service has run a session called ‘Poverty Reduction: Tools for frontline staff’ which brings together frontline staff (and senior decision makers) working across sectors in Hackney. On the call, people share information about how to best support residents and make connections with each other.

It has taken time, and consistency, to make it into a diverse, democratic space that is both practical and transformational. In the last session our Council Tax Collection Service, who have been attending the session regularly, opened their processes up by holding a discussion with community partners around better working with residents and each other around Council Tax Issues.

### **What’s next**

From what we’ve learned so far, building relationships in a complex system takes time and is never straightforward. It has even been dismissed at times as not ‘doing the real work’. However, we believe that the System Conveners and broader team ethos has been slowly breaking down the fear of working in this way.



People-centred councils  
driving social innovation  
putting people first

**E:** [comms@councils.coop](mailto:comms@councils.coop) | **T:** [@CoopInnovation](https://twitter.com/CoopInnovation) | **W:** [councils.coop](https://councils.coop)

We've seen some of the ripple effects of system convening play out across our work. For instance, a few other teams across the Council have been working with us to bring convening roles, job descriptions and principles to their work. We also regularly get asked for introductions or insight from the relationships that the Conveners have built. In the coming months, we'll build out our convening approach through work we're calling Fairer Help. Alongside this work, we'll be working with an external evaluator to help us better understand the impact of System Convening.

Ultimately, many of our colleagues do this work above and beyond their roles, not just the System Conveners. Real system leadership for 2024 and beyond in local government requires convening across the system, breaking down silos and putting residents at the centre.

---

**For further information contact:**

**Abby Hauver**

Strategic Delivery Manager – London Borough of Hackney [abby.hauver@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:abby.hauver@hackney.gov.uk) | [www.hackney.gov.uk](http://www.hackney.gov.uk)



People-centred councils  
driving social innovation  
putting people first

**E:** [comms@councils.coop](mailto:comms@councils.coop) | **T:** [@CoopInnovation](https://twitter.com/CoopInnovation) | **W:** [councils.coop](http://councils.coop)