

Hackney: Fairer Ways of Working A CCIN Policy Prototype Final Report

FAIRER WAYS OF WORKING



A Learning Journey in Building Fairer Systems

Hackney is one of the most diverse and creative places in the country. It is also one of the most unequal.¹ Inequality here is not only about income; it is about power, discrimination, trauma and the structural barriers that shape daily life. Years of austerity, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis have widened these inequalities and placed greater strain on local systems.

Traditional ways of working rooted in hierarchy, risk management and compliance have too often failed to respond meaningfully. Services become fragmented. Residents are passed between teams. Trust erodes.

The pandemic revealed a different possibility. When public services, VCS partners and residents came together around a shared purpose, entrenched barriers softened. Flexible, trusting relationships enabled timely, humane, effective support.

This prototype builds on that experience. It forms part of a longer learning journey: messy, relational, iterative and human. We have made mistakes, and continue to do so, but each one has deepened our understanding of what “fairer ways of working” look and feel like in practice. These ways of working centre trust and equity, put relationships first, and start with what matters most to communities most affected by inequality.

FAIRER WAYS OF WORKING

Fairer ways of working means taking action against poverty and inequality by working alongside communities on issues that are important to them. The Council does not have all the answers, but we can share power with people and organisations and work to ensure that everyone is valued and learning is acted on.

put PEOPLE first
BUILDING TRUST STARTS WITH BEING HUMAN
PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE CAN BE A BARRIER
relationships are the key to success
BE VISIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE IN THE COMMUNITY
be approachable... office wear will be out of place in most community settings

Sharing KNOWLEDGE and POWER
get together OFTEN (and not in council buildings)
listen and recognise the value of lived experience
LEARN FROM THE WAYS COMMUNITIES SUPPORT EACH OTHER
EVERYONE HAS something different to contribute!

ADAPT & learn
where you START won't be where you END UP!
DON'T BE AFRAID TO start small
MOVE AT THE PACE OF trust
write up your work so others can learn from you!
take the time to evaluate and reflect
ADAPT HOW YOU WORK AS NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARISE!

Hackney What can you do to embed fairer ways of working into your relationships with residents and community partners? Scan the QR code to read about project ideas you could try out and hear what our community partners have to say about working in new ways with the Council!

¹[Indices of deprivation](#); [Equality plan](#)

1. Background and Context

[Hackney's Community Strategy](#) (2018-2028) set tackling poverty and inequality as a core priority. In 2020, the Council publicly committed to becoming an overtly anti-racist organisation, recognising that inequality is systemic, not incidental.

[The Poverty Reduction Framework](#) (2022–2025) emphasised that progress depends on shifting *how* we work, not only *what* we deliver. It placed strengths-based, trauma-informed and relational practice at the heart of preventative support.

Hackney's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) plays a vital role in this shift. Deeply rooted in local communities, VCS organisations hold trusted relationships and understand the intersectional realities of discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage. They often work holistically, with flexibility statutory services can struggle to match, making them leaders in supporting residents facing the greatest barriers.

To test and learn from new approaches, the Council used non-recurrent funding to create temporary roles, prototypes and learning experiments. These were designed not to plug gaps but to trial **Fairer Ways of Working** capable of strengthening trust, sharing power and unlocking collective intelligence across the system.

Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network encourages members to find cooperative policy solutions to the challenges facing local government. The funding allowed us to position residents and community partners as key stakeholders in the development of this work to hold the project to account.

2. Enablers of the Fairer Ways of Working Prototypes

Community Infrastructure Programme (2022–2025)

Core funding was provided to 25 VCS organisations as a learning partnership. These organisations were recognised as experts and co-creators in building stronger, more connected communities and delivering early, relational support.

Networks and Learning Spaces

Systemwide collaboration has been strengthened through networks such as the Food Network, Advice Network and Tools for Frontline Staff—a fortnightly reflective learning space where colleagues share resources, ideas and practical tools. These spaces have become essential infrastructure for cross-sector learning.

Household Support Fund and Trusted Referrer Programme

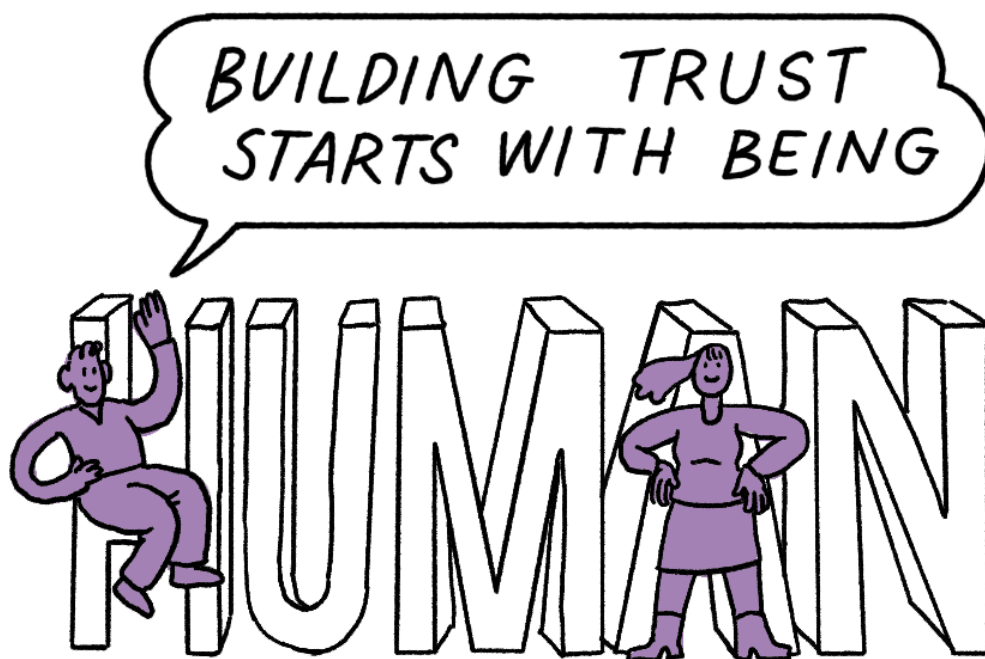
Building on pandemic learning, the Trusted Referrer Programme enabled VCS partners to make quick, trusted referrals for residents in hardship. Co-designed processes made support faster, more humane and less bureaucratic.

System Convening — Connecting the System to More of Itself

System Convening emerged as both a role and a way of working. Conveners act as boundary-spanning leaders who connect strategy with lived experience, policy with practice. Their work embodies Margaret Wheatley's principle that "if a system is broken, connect it to more of itself," nurturing the relationships, curiosity and compassion needed for fairer, more human public services.

Flexible Funding through CCIN

CCIN funding enabled fair payment for VCS expertise, supported the creation of a short film and a Fairer Ways of Working zine, and funded a live Tools for Frontline Staff event. These resources helped bring the story of this work to life and supported broader learning across the system.



3. Testing Fairer Ways of Working in Practice

The prototypes reflect the spirit of the work: uncertain beginnings, shared learning, and solutions shaped by listening deeply to residents and frontline partners. They are examples of how fairer ways of working emerge when people come together, challenge assumptions and imagine new possibilities.

Prototype 1: Council Tax and Fairer Debt Support

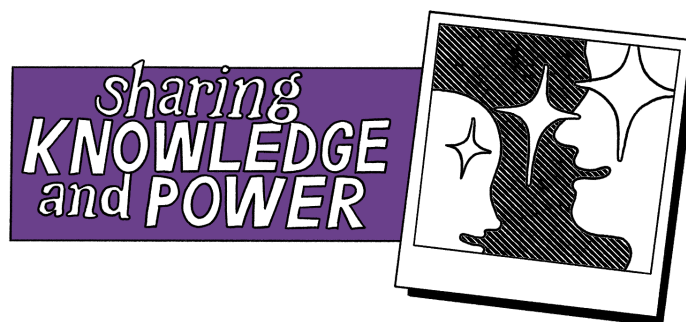
This project grew from the Tools for Frontline Staff sessions, where colleagues shared stories of residents struggling with Council Tax debt and the emotional burden it created. Recognising an opportunity for change, the Head of Revenues invited community partners to help reimagine the approach.

A cross-sector working group was formed, bringing together Customer Services, Revenues, Policy and Strategy colleagues with VCS partners. Together they explored real cases, identified systemic barriers and designed new solutions.

Key developments included:

- **Joint training for community partners** on Council Tax, co-designed and delivered by Council and VCS colleagues.
- **A Community Money Clinic**, where residents could speak directly with senior Revenues staff and receive benefits advice.
- **A collaborative escalation route** for complex or urgent cases—simple, direct and co-designed with VCS partners.

The work improved outcomes without additional cost, strengthened trust and created shared ownership between the Council and community partners.



Prototype 2: Families in Temporary Accommodation

Families living in temporary accommodation often described feeling invisible and “lost in the system.” Partners from Housing, Health, Early Years and the VCS collaborated to develop regular community drop-ins where families could access support in a welcoming, informal setting.

Designed with families through storytelling, feedback and participatory tools such as Photovoice, the sessions combined play, food and practical help.

This work demonstrated that:

- Shared meals and play build trust and connection
- Simple, human acts—listening, consistency, welcome—transform experiences
- Bringing services together in one place reduces stress and duplication
- Staff need reflective space to sustain relational practice

The model is now expanding and deepening links with schools, health partners and local community groups.



Additional Prototypes and Stories

Across the system, further stories illustrate fairer ways of working:



- **Peer-support and reflective practice** strengthening emotional resilience and collective learning
- **Household Support Fund delivery and co-location**, demonstrating the power of simple but relational processes
- **Tools for Frontline Staff** providing regular, accessible spaces for joint problem-solving and shared insight

These stories remind us that fairer ways of working do not emerge from fixed templates, but from shared experiments, honesty and imagination.



4. Fairer Ways of Working Principles

Through reflection sessions, zine-making workshops and cross-sector learning, seven core values consistently appeared in the work that felt fairest for residents and staff:

- **Put people first** – focusing on what matters most to residents.
- **Build trust** – creating psychological safety and honest relationships.
- **Collaborate at all levels** – connecting policy, practice and lived experience.
- **Adapt and disrupt** – testing new ideas and challenging rigid processes.
- **Build knowledge** – developing shared tools, language and understanding.
- **Prioritise equity** – confronting systemic bias and centring anti-racism.
- **Share and embed learning** – using mistakes as data and stories as evidence.

These values now shape work across core grants, food partnerships, the advice strategy and wider transformation. Together, they form the foundation of **Fairer Help**—Hackney’s approach to human, co-operative public services.

FAIRER WAYS OF WORKING

5. Mapping Learning to CCIN Values and Principles

Fairer Help reflects the authority's commitment to co-operative practice as a co-operative Council. These are reflected in the prototypes and can be seen in the way we approached the work.

- **Co-operation & Partnership** – building relationships across Council, VCS, Health and Communities. The relationship and partnership between the Council and the VCS is more vital than ever in ensuring that our most vulnerable residents are supported and protected. In these times of financial pressures for local councils (and many other sectors providing service for residents), there has never been a time when working together has been more important. This work recognises the need for deeper more meaningful partnerships based on trust, collaboration and challenge, recognising the unique knowledge of each partner.
- **Co-production** – residents and partners as equal contributors and decision-makers. As part of the Council Tax and Fairer Debt Support prototype, training that focused on what partners needed to help residents was designed and delivered by Council colleagues and community partners.
- **Innovation & Learning** – iterative, adaptive approaches rooted in real-world feedback. An example of this is the peer support spaces that were first created to improve the well-being and resilience of workers, influencing work on anti-racist practice, generating changes in staff structures in temporary accommodation. And as part of the VCS group, directly shaped improvements to the Council's grant making process and tackling inequality in the new VCS strategy.
- **Social Justice & Equity** – anti-racist, trauma-informed practice. This underpins the approach to Fairer Ways of Working. Ensuring systems or support for residents are strength-based, trauma informed and anti-racist and therefore community led and/or place based, working with the VCS to understand where inequity shows up in our systems.
- **Democratic Engagement** – centring resident voice and lived experience.- As with the principle above, this underpins the approach to Fairer Ways of Working. All of the prototypes are based on listening and learning directly from communities.
- **Empowerment & Local Ownership** – supporting local leadership through core funding. Through our core grants programme we fund organisations' purpose, rather than projects. This helps to free up the sector to operate in a more enterprising way and respond to what is needed.
- **Openness & Shared Learning** – storytelling, reflection and transparent learning. We share stories, not to be case studies or examples of "best practice", but ones that start in uncertainty and discover what happens when people with different experiences and perspectives come together and allow their assumptions to be challenged. Ideas that felt fixed at the beginning often shifted, and sometimes

transformed completely, as we listened to one another, tested things out and showed how thinking changed along the way.

6. Connection to Broader Learning Frameworks

Human Learning Systems

Fairer Help aligns with HLS principles by treating services as networks of relationships, valuing continuous learning and adapting to context rather than compliance.

The Liberated Method

The work embodies distributed leadership, micro-innovation and collective intelligence.

AMBIT (Anna Freud Centre)

The AMBIT model emphasises epistemic trust and the “team around the worker.” These ideas underpin Hackney’s commitment to reflective practice, relational supervision and viewing breakdowns as opportunities for repair and learning.

Collective and Social Imagination

Fairer ways of working create the conditions to imagine fairer futures together—through shared sense-making, prototyping and valuing lived experience as legitimate knowledge.

7. What We’re Learning and Where We’re Going

This work has shaped Hackney’s Equalities Plan, Anti-Racist Framework, Poverty Reduction Framework and the refreshed VCS [Strategy](#) (2025–2035). It is influencing transformation across Council Tax, Housing, Customer Services, Health, Libraries and Family Hubs.

Key insights include:

- **Change happens at the speed of trust.**
- **Systems shift when relationships become our infrastructure.**
- **Learning is not linear—it is messy, emotional and human.**
- **Mistakes are inevitable—and invaluable—when we learn in public.**

Rethinking Measurement and Accountability

Traditional measurement systems—designed for stability and predictability—can unintentionally reinforce inequality by prioritising outputs over human outcomes, rewarding compliance over learning and locating “evidence” within institutions rather than communities.

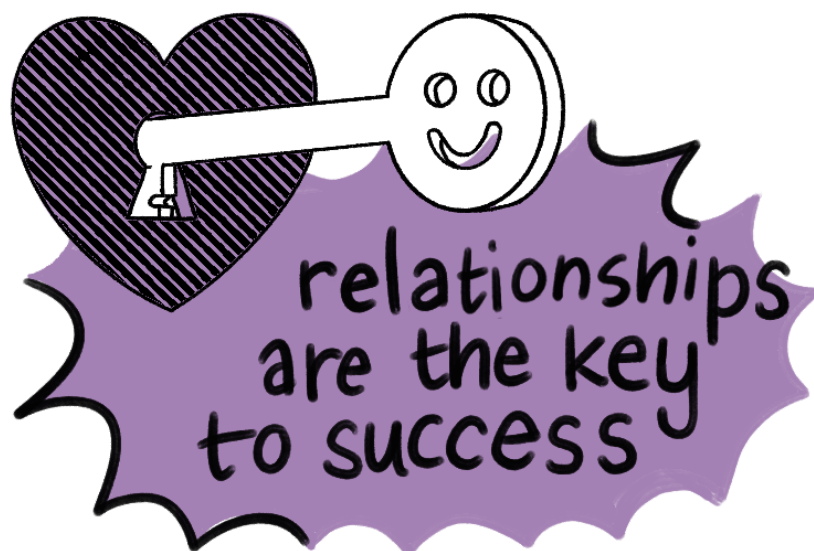
To create fairer systems, new forms of accountability are needed—rooted in relational trust, collective reflection and stories of change as much as quantitative data. Fairness becomes something we practice, not simply measure.

This work is long, slow and courageous. But when we centre fairness, trust and collective purpose, we create the conditions for public services that are fairer not just in outcomes, but in how they work.

Acknowledgements

Across Hackney, frontline staff and volunteers are doing extraordinary work with limited resources. We thank all those who support residents facing the greatest barriers and who continue to imagine and build a fairer Hackney.

There is power in the collective. Together we are strong.



For further information.

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