

Philip Glanville, Mayor of Hackney
London Borough of Hackney
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mayor@hackney.gov.uk

Dear Hackney Green Party, Hackney Women's Equality Party and Hackney Liberal Democrats

Sistah Space

Thank you for your open letter and concerns. We're responding in the same open and transparent spirit.

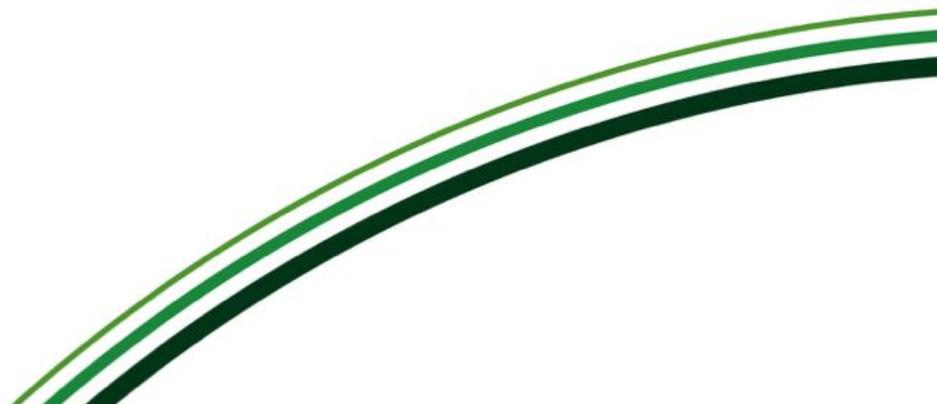
We want to be absolutely clear, as the Council has been throughout – we're not evicting Sistah Space, putting services at risk nor forcing them out of their current temporary premises during lockdown.

We agree that domestic abuse services are vital – especially during the coronavirus pandemic. We've seen referrals to our own comprehensive service increase, and we're determined that anyone suffering domestic abuse gets the support they need.

It's why we've increased capacity within Hackney's domestic abuse intervention service during coronavirus, fund one of the highest number of refuge spaces in London, and are continuing to rehouse and support migrant women with no recourse to public funds who we know are particularly vulnerable during this crisis.

Sistah Space is an important charity offering much-needed services to women and girls of African heritage affected by domestic abuse – who we know are also disproportionately affected by coronavirus.

We've long supported their work – from offering them a Council-owned voluntary sector property to use in 2016, helping fundraise for them as one of the Speaker's nominated charities, to investing £35,000 on refurbishing their premises at their request over the last few months.



Sistah Space raised concerns with us about repairs and maintenance issues at their registered premises in Lower Clapton Road. In response, the Council has stopped any rent due, and carried out improvements and changes to the building agreed with Sistah Space to make it more secure. To ensure the continuation of their service while these works were underway, we worked with them to identify space within a building on Mare Street for their use for a short period while the works were carried out. These arrangements were agreed to by Sistah Space, who agreed to move back to their registered premises on Lower Clapton Road in March 2020 when the work was complete.

In March, coronavirus changed everything – and we've been very clear that Sistah Space would not have to move until it was safe to do so. That remains our position – and we've extended our offer until the end of July at the very earliest.

We're very disappointed that Sistah Space have continued to claim that we are evicting them, claimed to have suspended their services when they have no need to do so and have refused our most recent attempts to meet them to discuss the exact reasons why they feel unable to move back to Lower Clapton Road now that the work they asked us to carry out has been done. Their current premises is a shared commercial workspace, and was never intended as a permanent home. It is simply not true that we are evicting them or asking them to stop their work, and Sistah Space have made a number of claims publicly that they have not spoken to us about directly.

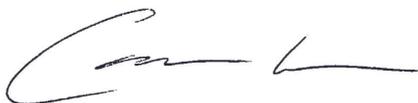
While no other Council-owned voluntary sector properties are currently vacant, we've always made clear to Sistah Space that we will work with them to try to identify longer-term options that better meet their service needs, while also being clear that any lettings of Council buildings need to be subject to an open and transparent process to ensure we are being fair to the voluntary sector as a whole. Access to affordable space is a challenge across the voluntary sector, and it is important we are objective and fair about how space is used and allocated.

We hope that you will recognise the deep commitment that the Council has to investing in our diverse voluntary sector, tackling racism, disproportionality, and supporting those affected by domestic abuse.

Yours sincerely



Philip Glanville
Mayor of Hackney



Cllr Caroline Selman
Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and the Voluntary Sector