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Cllr Sharon Patrick
Chair
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

18 September 2019

Dear Cllr Patrick

RE: Housing Services Support of Resident Engagement

Thank you for your insightful comments and recommendation relating to the presentation and paper from the Divisional Head of Tenancy & Leasehold Services, Gilbert Stowe, regarding Housing Services support of resident engagement, at the July meeting of the Scrutiny Commission.

I will respond to each of your 11 recommendations in turn as follows;

Recommendation 1 - That the Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services leads on the development of a Resident Participation Team Service Plan. That this sets out and monitors progress against a set of objectives and success measures. That the objectives and success measures are informed in part by the discussions in the July meeting (recommendations 2, 4, 6 and 10 cover the specific measures / aspects suggested by the Commission), and the wider consultation with stakeholders which the service confirmed are being carried out.

1. **Response** - We welcome the development of a new Resident Participation (RP) Team Service plan which will set out key priorities and objectives in line with the improvement of engagement services across the whole of Housing Services. This plan will, as suggested, clearly state what success measures are expected, responsibilities for delivery and realistic timescales to achieve success.
 - 1.1 We are aware of the challenges of engaging with social housing residents in the current social and political environment and the changing nature of the landlord relationship with social housing tenants and leaseholders. We are therefore committed to being creative in the way that we seek to improve engagement with those living in Council homes.
 - 1.2 We acknowledge that improvement is needed to the systems and processes underpinning the formal engagement functions, as well as improvements to the knowledge and skill set of those directly engaging and communicating with tenants and leaseholders on the front-line.



- 1.3 To this end, the Interim Head of Resident Participation has commissioned independent experts from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), to carry out a 'Smart Review' exercise, which assesses how Hackney Housing Services is performing against the National Engagement Standards in terms of our engagement and participation with those residents living in Council managed homes.

Following a desk exercise that we are currently working on, the TPAS consultant will be holding focus groups with relevant engagement staff and with involved residents in late September. TPAS will produce a report with their recommendations in early October 19. The findings from this will be used to help us work with RLG to plan wider resident consultation so that we can identify key priorities for those involved, (as well as 'less involved'), residents across the borough and ultimately develop a Resident Engagement Strategy for Housing Services for the next 3 years.

- 1.4 As you are aware, we are looking to strengthen the two main workstreams of the Resident Participation and Communities team commencing with a restructure of the service and a re-focusing of the roles and responsibilities of staff in this team. A delegated powers report (DPR) is currently being compiled which would commence the restructure in October 19.

Recommendation 2 - We note from the paper that the service worked to target unrepresented estates with support in 2018/19. We ask that this work continues, with priority given to those estates in neighbourhoods with relatively lower numbers of TRAs (based on both the number of TRAs in the neighbourhood and the numbers of estates/Hackney Housing units). We ask that this planned activity is reflected in the new Service Plan (as per Recommendation 1), with success measures and monitoring in place against these.

2. **Response** – We wholeheartedly agree that whilst TRAs are the mainstay of local formal resident engagement, there is a need to prioritise support and empowerment of currently under-represented estates to engage with Housing Services over service improvements and delivery. In addition to the 40 under-represented estates targeted last year, we will embed into the Service plan a further target, the outcomes of which will be monitored and measured against set success criteria.

Recommendation 3 - We ask that the update to the Commission in December provides both the numbers of registered TRAs within each Neighbourhood and also the numbers of Hackney Housing estates and units within each. This will allow the Commission a more informed view on the areas which are relatively higher and lower represented neighbourhoods.

3. **Response** - This information will be collated and forwarded to the Commission as requested.

Recommendation 4 - We recommend that the new Service Plan for the Resident Engagement Team (as per Recommendation 1) includes success measures around:

- The scale of engagement and input by tenants and leaseholders in decision-making around RLIB spending (this might include the numbers and percentages attending walkabout sessions and the numbers engaging in online surveys)
- Outcomes achieved through RLIB spending

4. **Response** – The RLIB was only introduced in April 2018 in its current format and we recognise that there is a need to develop the way in which estate improvements are identified, agreed, monitored and delivered. As the Scrutiny Commission rightly suggest, one way of promoting this opportunity is through greater public information on the outcomes delivered from the funding being publicised to the local community. We agree with this and it will be added as a measure of success to the Service plan.

Other measures of success within the Service plan would include reviewing the estate walkabout in terms of publicity, times communication and inclusion. Also, making better use of other communication channels for gaining resident input into the priorities on the estate, including social media and other methods of engagement and communication. (As given in the example of an online consultation survey in the Shoreditch area).

Recommendation 5 - We recommend that details of improvements delivered by the RLIB are made available on myhackney.org (the site used by the Resident Participation Team to communicate with residents) and are included in wider RLIB communications within an aim of seeking to engage more tenants and leaseholders in the process.

5. **Response** – The restructure of the RP team and the re-defining of staff roles and responsibilities will assist in a focus on promoting and celebrating successful co-production and co-design with residents. Housing Services is seeking to put Council social housing residents at the heart of everything we do. Working in partnership with tenants and leaseholders to improve the estates where they live is fundamental to engaging in a meaningful way and being inclusive in decision-making at all levels of engagement.

We will work closely with the Council Communications, Culture and Engagement team to ensure that improvements delivered through the RLIB are publicised as widely as possible to encourage greater engagement by tenants and leaseholders in the process.

Recommendation 6 - We recommend that the new Service Plan for the Resident Engagement Team (as per Recommendation 1) includes success measures around:

- Engagement in the CDF (this might include numbers of applications and the number and values of awards)
- Outcomes achieved through CDF funding

6. **Response** - The CDF was only introduced in its current format in April 2018 and we recognise that there is a need to encourage greater take up on this grant. It should be noted that in the previous report we stated £95,000 take up in 2018/19, however this figure did not include all grant money from both the Tenant Levy and 'Mast underspend'. This figure is in fact approx. £178,000, however, we do appreciate that this is still an underspend against the £342,000 available.

- 6.1. Again, we appreciate the need to publicise this opportunity more widely, using all available media and actively encouraging existing TRAs and Supported Resident

Groups to utilise this funding to benefit tenants and communities with as wide a range of social and cultural events and activities as possible.

- 6.2 Alongside this, we welcome the suggestion to review the application process, to ensure it is as seamless and accessible as possible. The new RP service leadership will put emphasis on providing proactive, positive support to those applying in all cases. The Service plan will include success measures on numbers of applications and values of awards.
- 6.3 We will also put an emphasis on seeking match funding for community projects and events to provide value for money for residents and on close partnership working with community and voluntary sector to deliver events and initiatives that make a genuine difference to those living in social housing in the borough.
- 6.4 We will give consideration to the Commission's suggestion relating to releasing unallocated funds at year end to benefit the local community as part of our review of RP. However, it should be noted that Tenant Levy money must be allocated to initiatives and activities that directly benefit tenants.

Recommendation 7 - We also recommend that details of activities and events delivered through CDF funding are made available on myhackney.org and are included in wider CDF communications within an aim of seeking to engage more tenants and leaseholders in the process.

7. Response –Adding Social value.

We will work closely with the Council Communications, Culture and Engagement team to ensure that projects delivered through the CDF are publicised as widely as possible to encourage greater engagement by tenants and leaseholders in the process.

Recommendation 8 - As a final note, we ask that the update in December includes confirmation of Community Development Fund budgets for 2019/20.

8. **Response** – This information will be collated and forwarded to the Commission as requested.

Recommendation 9 - We ask that consideration is given to the examples of digital engagement cited in the London Assembly Housing Committee's [Hearing Resident voices in social housing](#) report. We ask for feedback on any planned use of digital platforms for engaging residents on Hackney Housing estates.

9. **Response** – We are open to any best practice regarding making best use of digital platforms for engaging with tenants & leaseholders, including the London Assembly report. As the Commission points out, it is becoming increasingly challenging to secure the involvement of tenants and leaseholders who are not engaged through the more traditional, formal structures in place. Most Housing organisations are introducing self-serve platforms and offering greater flexibility in how we communicate and engage with social housing residents on a day to day basis.

- 9.1 As you will be aware, the Council Communications, Culture and Engagement team takes a 'Whole citizen approach to engagement' - the Council already engages with its residents on many different subjects - which includes tenants and leaseholders - in many different ways. Over the past year the '**Hackney Matters' Online Citizens Panel** has been developed – this is the Council's online communication and consultation portal – there are currently approx. 180 tenants, leaseholders and home-owners as members of the panel - the total citizens on the panel being around 660. In 2018/19 Members were consulted on everything from ASB, Parks, Parking, Housing issues, Public Realm, Streetscene, etc.
- 9.2 Working with the Consultation and Engagement team, we are looking to build up the numbers of tenants & leaseholders regularly taking part in this online forum. This is a valuable resource for engagement and one that Housing Services plans to utilise more in coming years for consultations.
- 9.3 Alongside this, Housing Services has recently commissioned ICT to develop an overall digital strategy for Housing that seeks to offer residents more ways of communicating and engaging with us as their landlord. – please see attached document which sets out our principles around a digital channel shift and supporting social housing residents to engage with us online and using social media.
- 9.4 The restructure of RP will put the emphasis firmly back on to enabling the 'voice of the tenant' to be heard in all aspects of how we as a landlord deliver services to our residents. Demonstrating that social housing residents are able to influence and scrutinise strategy, policy, standards, approaches and performance targets at different levels within Housing Services. Additionally, engagement is outcome focused and is designed to improve services and communities, as well as provide value for money and transparency.

Recommendation 10 - We ask that the paper provided for the update in the December meeting reports on what the Service sees as the wider policies and strategies which the Resident Participation Team sees itself as making key contributions to, and what form these contributions will take.

10. **Response** – This information will be provided to the Commission as requested.

Recommendation 11 - We ask that the that the new Service Plan for the Resident Engagement Team (as per Recommendation 1) draws on the Council's wider policies and strategies and sets out action and success measures around how these will be contributed to.

11. **Response** - We will ensure that the Service plan sets out how the work of the Resident Participation and Communities team will contribute to delivery of the commitments of the wider Council policies and strategies including:

- Hackney Corporate plan / Mayors Manifesto
- Housing Strategy / Green Infrastructure Plan
- Arts and Cultural Strategy
- Older persons strategy
- Fair Futures Commission / Hackney Works - Employment & Skills / Youth Parliament
- Inclusive Economy Strategy
- Recycling initiatives
- Public health initiatives

11.1 Actions and success measures will include how we can demonstrate that engaged residents living in social housing will have had the opportunity to influence and input into these important Council strategies and initiatives over the coming years.

11.2 Community Halls Review

The Community Halls Review Terms of Reference fortunately already covers all the suggestions made by the Scrutiny Commission. At the December 2019 Scrutiny Commission meeting an update will be provided as to where we are with the review and some early observations/findings.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cllr McKenzie', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Clayeon McKenzie
Cabinet Member for Housing Services