

<p><b>Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission</b></p> <p>9 March 2021</p> <p><b>Housing Services resident participation and engagement – update report</b></p>	<p><b>Item No</b></p>
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## 1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report presents an update to the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission on the approach to supporting engagement and participation for tenants and leaseholders within Housing Services.
- 1.2 It includes an overview of the work of the Resident Participation Service during the Covid-19 pandemic, and highlights progress on many of the issues raised by the Commission to the Cabinet Member for Housing Services in the letter of 14 August 2019. This includes our work to widen involvement, to improve alignment with the delivery of wider Council policies and strategies, and to promote digital engagement.
- 1.3 An update is also given on the progress of the re-structure of the service and development of a new Resident Engagement Strategy for Housing Services.
- 1.4 As the Commission will recognise, 2020/21 has been a challenging year for the service and our residents, with many of the usual ways of bringing people together not possible due to the restrictions in place. However, the service has adapted well and continued to deliver important benefits for our residents. The restructure of the service and development of the Resident Engagement Strategy is designed to drive further improvements in promoting strong and meaningful engagement with tenants and leaseholders, and improve the take up of participation funds.

## 2. RESIDENT PARTICIPATION IN LOCKDOWN

- 2.1 The introduction of lockdown measures in March 2020, and their continuation through much of the financial year, has inevitably reduced the range of resident participation activities that we could deliver safely. However, it has also provided a springboard for the development of new initiatives and ways of working, including work to: support more vulnerable tenants and leaseholders; provide summer activities for children and young people on our estates; widen participation and engagement; and promote more digital engagement. An overview of some of our key initiatives is set out below.

### **Supporting Vulnerable Residents**

- 2.2 Early in lockdown, we recognised that some tenants and leaseholders would be isolated, anxious and vulnerable during the pandemic, especially those in the shielding group. In response, the Resident Participation Team launched the ‘Let’s Talk’ project on 4 April 2020. This gave residents a chance to chat to a team member to highlight any support needs and/or talk to them on a regular basis to reduce feelings of isolation. A referral route was established, allowing housing officers contacting residents to signpost them through to the project. The project

was also promoted extensively through e-newsletters, Our Homes, myhackney.org, and twitter.

- 2.3 Engagement with the project exceeded early expectations, with 517 residents engaged and over 1,500 support calls made between April and August 2020. Of those engaged: 413 were tenants and 104 were leaseholders; 36 per cent were over 70; 56 per cent were single person households; over half had a health condition or disability; and 75 per cent were in receipt of housing benefit and /or Council tax support.
- 2.4 In many cases, problems experienced by residents had often been exacerbated by the pandemic and support provided through the programme varied, but included:
- Helping residents who had missed food deliveries, run out of food or were in need of medication get what they needed.
  - Making referrals to adult social care, where residents support needs had changed during lockdown, or if there were safeguarding concerns
  - Putting residents in touch with local mutual aid groups who could help with shopping, paying bills and charging electric and gas meters.
- 2.5 Delivery of the project has strengthened relationships with Council services and partner agencies. For example, the service manager has represented Housing Services on a multidisciplinary group set up corporately to deal with complex cases, and worked with Public Health staff to ensure that learning from 'Let's Talk' fed into the development of the corporate approach that has evolved to support residents in later lockdown phases. Resident participation staff have also benefited from training provided by Public Health - for example in 'making every contact count' (MECC) and mental health and domestic violence modules, helping to strengthen their capacity to support, and signpost, residents more effectively.
- 2.6 The project has equally highlighted the immense challenges some tenants and leaseholders face, with existing inequalities in health, income, and employment, and the impact of overcrowding, often exacerbated through the impact of Covid-19. Learning from this work will play an important role in shaping the approach to the resident engagement strategy, with a focus on developing approaches which promote inclusivity, and on new opportunities to invest participation funds to maximise benefits to our diverse communities.

### **Children and Young People Summer Programme**

- 2.7 With schools closed from March to June and early research indicating that children and young people from deprived areas were more likely to be impacted adversely by the pandemic, we commissioned a summer programme for children and young people on our estates.
- 2.8 The programme, which was developed in conjunction with Young Hackney to prevent overlap and duplication of resources, was targeted across 12 estates, plus Hackney Marshes and Victoria Park, with five providers offering a range of activities over eight weeks. This engaged over 350 children and young people, and there was some success in reaching communities that we often fail to reach, including Jewish children on Sandford Court and those from Muslim communities on Nelson Mandela Estate. The youth projects at Nisbet House, Frampton Park, Jack Dunning, Nightingale, Kings Crescent, Hackney Marshes,

Victoria Park and Hawksley Court were also well attended across a range of age groups.

- 2.9 While the level of investment made in 2020/21 is unlikely to be sustainable in future years, we are looking to see how we can build on this work and respond to Young Future Commission 'asks' for young people to have a stronger voice in our formal resident engagement structures and for a young people's project fund. We are currently working with Young Hackney and the Young Futures Commission Officer Lead to progress this, including the development of a pilot peer research project on the Nightingale Estate.

### **Widening Resident Involvement**

- 2.10 While there is an ongoing need to prioritise support and empowerment of currently under-represented estates, this year's focus has been on supporting our **78 registered tenants and tenant and resident associations (TRAs)**, with all contacted through spring/summer so we could better understand their support requirements and tailor our offer to the new operating environment. We have nonetheless made progress on widening involvement through a number of work areas highlighted below:

#### **Residents' Estate Improvement Fund (REIF)**

- 2.11 This year marked a significant shift in the way we promote engagement in making decisions about residents' estate funding, with a focus on widening involvement in the process.
- 2.12 Following consultation with the Resident Liaison Group (RLG), we agreed to rename the Resident Led Improvement Budget (RLIB), with its new name - the **Residents' Estate Improvement Fund (REIF)** - better reflecting that this £1 million pot of funding is earmarked to improve Hackney's estates and deliver the sort of improvement residents want to see. We also supplemented the traditional programme of estate walkabouts with a much wider programme of consultation, developed in partnership with other areas of Housing Services and the Council's Communications, Culture and Engagement Team. This included:
- Sending out an online survey form to encourage more residents to make suggestions and rank potential areas for improvement in order of importance, with a link to the survey text out to tenants and leaseholders we hold mobile numbers for (29, 241).
  - Circulating a paper copy of the survey in Our Homes newsletter, with prepaid reply slip
  - Publishing the consultation through Facebook, Twitter, e-newsletters and the Hackney Council website, with a link to the survey on Citizen's Space .
- 2.13 The survey generated a good response, with 805 responses, of which 798 were submitted online ( see **Appendix 1**). Building Maintenance (who hold the REIF budget and manage programme planning and delivery) are now in the process of developing a programme based on feedback from the walkabouts and wider consultation. This will be shared with Area Panels and TRAs and posted on estate noticeboards. We will also text a link to the final programme to housing residents we hold a mobile number for, allowing them to view the results online.
- 2.14 Based on this exercise, we expect to continue to achieve 100 percent spend against the REIB over the current and next financial year. We will also use learning

from this work to better promote the community development fund in the next year, especially as in-year spending has been limited in 2020/ 21.

### **Targeting Under-Represented Areas**

- 2.15 Targeted engagement work in Cazenove ward, an area with a well below average representation of TRAs, has helped to engage residents who are outside the formal structure and hear their concerns. This has included hosting zoom meetings to engage residents on Broad Common Estate, Avenue House and Nelson Mandela House, with meetings promoted through flyers delivered door-to-door, posters, email and texts. The team has also met with faith group leaders and are working with the Consultation and Engagement Team to improve awareness and engagement with the Orthodox Jewish community who are under-represented amongst our TRAs. As part of this work, we are encouraging more residents to apply and utilise grants from the Community Development Fund in 2021/22.
- 2.16 In our service planning for 2021/22, we are now looking at how to extend this approach, working in conjunction with the neighbourhood Area Panels.

### **Community Gardens and Grow Spaces**

- 2.17 There are currently 55 grow spaces and community gardens across Hackney's estates. The Resident Participation Team plays an important role in supporting groups to establish new spaces, to secure internal / /external funding and corporate volunteering days to develop them, and provides training and support to ensure sustainability and inclusion. Partners in this work this year have included Hackney Street Scene, Groundwork, the Woodland Trust, Grounds Maintenance, Curved Earth, London Marathon and the Greater London Authority.
- 2.18 Through lockdown, these spaces have often provided much needed respite for residents, and offered a focal point for engagement and support - for example, Shrubland TRA has delivered vegetables / soup made from garden produce to households in need. Some new spaces have also been established this year, including those on Nelson Mandela and Shannon Court Estates, and work has continued to support the development of newer spaces on Colville and Welshpool Estates and improve some more established spaces.
- 2.19 We have also funded Cordwainers Grow CIC- a Hackney-based community group - to pilot an Easy Grow Greens project across four estates (Fellows Court, Amwell Court, Portland Rise and Linzell Estate). This introduced residents who had not been involved in green space initiatives to healthy food growing practices and promoted interest in developing grow spaces on estates. The project engaged 30 households, with 75 percent from Black and other ethnic communities. Building on this, steering groups of 7/ 8 residents are now looking to develop community grow spaces at both Amwell Court and Portland Rise.
- 2.20 The development of the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy will provide new opportunities to further develop this area of work, though we are mindful of a need to ensure that any new initiatives are well-supported by estates residents.

### **Promoting Digital Inclusion**

- 2.21 The pandemic has led to an increased reliance on digital engagement, and there has been some success in transitioning to new ways of working. For example, the Resident Liaison Group (RLG) has been meeting online regularly since June 2020,

and some of the Area Panels and TRAs have hosted successful meetings and kept in contact via whatsapp groups.

- 2.22 We have also used a range of digital tools to promote participation budgets and widen participation, provided direct training to involved residents, and linked TRAs to corporate ICT initiatives, such as the Digital Buddies scheme, which provides online 'how to' guides and can link someone to a trained young person to help with their digital or technical issue over the phone. TRAs can use their TRA support grants (up to £600 per annum) to purchase IT equipment and zoom licences, and via previous grants, many are already well-equipped.
- 2.23 Some participation activities have also moved online. For example, in the first lockdown we ran a number of exercise classes on myhackney.org and moved youth activities provided by Mentoring Lab and bicycle repair workshops online.
- 2.24 We are nonetheless aware that digital engagement is not universal, with feedback from many TRAs and the 13 Older People's Groups showing that some residents are not digitally confident and /or have concerns about holding meetings which may exclude others. We will therefore be using the development of the Resident Engagement Strategy to explore how we can better promote digital inclusion - with options including inter-generational and peer support schemes, silver surfer training sessions, and online guides, as well as mixed virtual /physical meetings.
- 2.25 The roll out of the 'Better Broadband' full fibre internet connectivity programme to Council homes and community halls over the next few years will further support this work, and we are working closely with ICT to plan and prioritise its delivery. Linked to this, we are also developing proposals with Hackney Works to run Adult Education classes from some community halls from September 2021 onwards, some of which may focus on digital skills development.

### **3. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF RESIDENT PARTICIPATION - FUTURE PRIORITIES**

- 3.1 We have continued to make progress on the reorganisation of the Resident Participation Service and development of a new Resident Engagement Strategy for Housing Services.
- 3.2 As the Committee will recall, a formal restructure of the Resident Participation Service was in progress before lockdown, taking into account feedback from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) review. However, a corporate decision to halt work on restructures during the first lockdown delayed implementation, and we decided to revisit our proposals to take account of learning from (and the impact of) the pandemic, and more recent developments, including the publication of a new [Social Housing White Paper](#) in November 2020 and Black Lives Matter movement.
- 3.3 This further work has reaffirmed the broad emphasis on ensuring that the new service enables the 'voice of the tenant' to be heard in all aspects of service delivery and improvement, and provides meaningful opportunities for residents to influence and scrutinise strategy, policy, performance and standards. It has equally underlined a need to:
- **Further improve partnership working and networking skills** - the scale of vulnerability and need among a significant minority of tenants and leaseholders has been highlighted strongly through Covid. An effective response from Resident Participation will depend on working in partnership

with a range of services and agencies to address this e.g. by linking into wider work on employment, training, health and well-being, and regeneration that can support new project delivery and bring benefits to residents. With statutory partners increasingly delivering alongside a range of voluntary and community sector partners, all RP staff will need to have good navigation skills and to work in a solution focussed way with multiple stakeholders.

- **Use engagement to address inequality** - we have long recognised a need to develop better ways to engage different groups of residents, build a more granular understanding of their needs and aspirations, and put more focus on co-production of new initiatives. However, the pandemic and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has made clear that the focus on the particular needs of certain groups - such as people from Black and ethnic communities and others with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 - needs to be strengthened further to ensure that all have a strong voice in shaping new proposals and derive equal benefit from the team's work.
- **Focus on resource generation** - with increased pressure on housing budgets, it will be important to make effective use of resources which are allocated to the team. Equally, with the flow of funding from the aerial masts diminishing, there needs to be greater focus on securing resources from other national and regional funders and diversifying the income base. With many bidding regimes focussed on grants to community-led and charitable groups, this will mean developing the capacity and capability of TRAs and other groups to develop successful bids (and ensure funding is managed effectively).
- **Create a service-wide culture of participation and empowerment** - *'The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper'*, puts a strong emphasis on improving resident engagement across the social housing sector. This includes proposals to strengthen consumer regulation, backed by inspection of larger social landlords (1000 plus homes) every four years. Responding to the demands posed by the White Paper will require a strong focus on developing a service culture characterised by openness, accountability, transparency and respect between tenant and landlord and a further strengthening of resident involvement in service delivery and improvement. While this is a 'whole service' responsibility, the Resident Participation Service will play an important role in identifying good practice, steering the development of a new Resident Engagement Strategy to shape our overall approach, and supporting the training and development of both involved residents and Housing Service staff.
- **Further develop the 'Whole Citizen Approach' to consultation and engagement** - In 2017 the Communications, Culture and Engagement Department began to develop and embed the corporate communications and engagement plan for the Council. As part of this, and the low numbers of 'tenant voices' on key strategic campaigns and consultations, it was felt that engagement with tenants and leaseholders needed to better reflect a full range of corporate issues and that the strong tenant-landlord relationship was not being utilised to give residents in the most vulnerable communities a say on matters that impacted them most. As such, the 'Whole Citizen Approach' for Housing Services began to emerge and joint working between Housing Services and corporate communications and engagement has been strengthened to drive improvements. The restructure needs to to further

develop this relationship so that the unique and often direct relationship between Council tenant or leaseholder and the Council as the landlord is utilised to give residents a strong voice on all of our corporate consultation and engagement work.

3.4 These issues have now been taken into account more fully in the revised service structure for the Resident Participation Team, with the new model including:

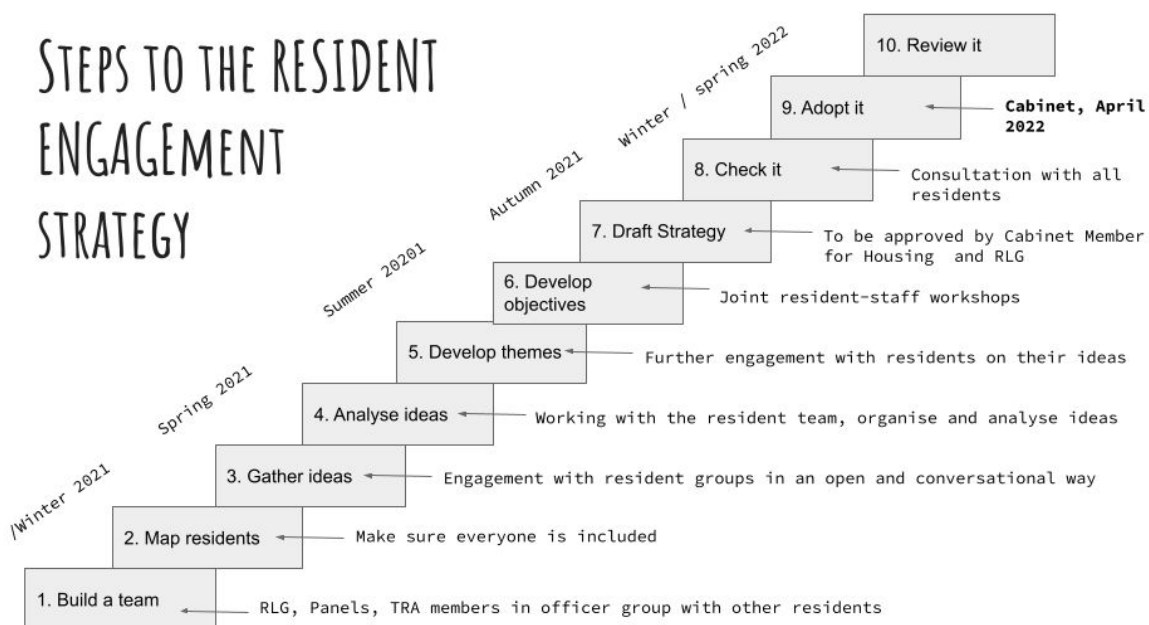
- **community and development resources** to support community project development and green projects, improve our engagement on regeneration projects, and allow more focus on leveraging in external grant funding;
- **a dedicated youth and community engagement role** to support delivery of Young Future Commission 'asks', to increase involvement of young people in service improvement and design, and to strengthen links with existing youth engagement work led by Young Hackney and the Young Futures Commission;
- **ongoing support to the involved structure**, with an enhanced focus on widening representation and diversity as part of our governance support and training and developmental roles;
- **resources to revitalise and develop the resident scrutiny function**, ensuring that residents are able to influence decision-making and review performance in key service areas; and
- **more formal links to the Council's Communications, Culture and Engagement Team**, designed to embed a stronger focus on building wider engagement of tenants and leaseholders into corporate initiatives and promote the 'Whole Citizen' approach on all consultation and engagement activity.

3.5 Staff consultation on these revised proposals concluded on 15 February 2021 and a final structure has now been agreed, with the new team expected to be fully operational by **June 2021**.

3.6 In parallel we have recently begun work on the development of a **new Resident Engagement Strategy for Housing Services**, co-produced with residents as equal partners. This work, which was delayed due to the pandemic, will be an important opportunity to promote an 'engagement positive' culture across the service, to build greater recognition of engagement as a service improvement tool, and ensure that attitudes and behaviours promote trust and mutual respect. While the process will be iterative - and ultimately be shaped around the concerns and issues that matter most to residents - we expect the strategy development process to:

- establish a clear vision for resident engagement, supported by clear principles, strategic aims and objectives;
- shape our menu of engagement and participation activities to maximise involvement and produce meaningful outcomes;
- consider new ways to improve resident satisfaction and increase representation across our estates;

- consider how we can improve the quality of information and communication to keep residents up-to- date and infomed;
- explore how we can further strengthen our relationship with our tenant management organisations and share good practice;
- improve how we consult with and report back to residents and show that we have taken their views into account;
- explore how other council services, and voluntary and community sector partners can support Housing residents to deliver community projects; and
- look at how we how can we better use of our resources (participation funds community halls, and digital tools) to support engagement and maximise community benefits;
- consider how we can strengthen performance management to ensure a clearer focus on value for money, social value and outcome monitoring;
- The strategy development process itself will be an important opportunity to engage with a wide range of residents, community groups and other stakeholders and to seek their views on how we can improve our ways of working across all areas of Housing Services. We are therefore working closely with the Communications, Culture and Engagement Team to ensure that we learn from recent strategic development work, including the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and Ageing Well Strategy, and make the approach as inclusive as possible. In order to maximise contributions, we currently envisage that the development process will take around 12 months, with a draft strategy published for consultation in Autumn 2021, with key steps set out below:



## 4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 As this report has demonstrated, 2020/21 has been a year of challenge and transition for the Resident Participation Service, with further progress on: widening engagement, promoting the digital agenda, the reorganisation of the service, and



the development of a new strategic framework to better guide service planning and prioritisation. The pandemic has in turn sharpened our focus on the inequalities many tenants and leaseholders face in relation to employment , health and systemic discrimination - and, more positively, highlighted the benefit of strong communities that can provide support, increase resilience and reduce isolation. In the year ahead, we will continue to consult and listen to our residents to better understand how we can build upon these strengths to further improve participation and engagement and contribute to both the wider corporate agenda to rebuild a better Hackney and the proposals set out in the White Paper.

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