

<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy</b>	
<b>Key Decision No</b>	CHE S135	
<b>For Consideration By</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>12 December 2022</b>	
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	<b>Cllr Clayeon McKenzie, Cabinet Member for Housing Services and Resident Participation</b>	
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>	
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	<b>All</b>	
<b>Key Decision &amp; Reason</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards</b>
<b>Implementation Date if Not Called In</b>	<b>19 December 2022</b>	
<b>Group Director</b>	<b>Rickardo Hyatt, Group Director for Climate, Homes and Economy</b>	

## **1. Cabinet Member's introduction**

- 1.1. Hackney Council has one of the largest stocks of social housing in the country, with 30,761 households living in our homes. This includes council tenants, freeholders, leaseholders, private renters and shared owners, all of whom need to be able to communicate and engage with Housing Services to resolve service issues easily, and to have opportunities to genuinely influence our service delivery and decision-making.
- 1.2. The Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2025, which has been produced in partnership with residents and housing services staff over

many months, sets out our proposals to improve the way we do this. It reflects the views of many thousands of residents who live in our homes and includes a wide range of proposals designed to help us talk to, listen and involve residents more effectively. It reinforces our commitment to put the resident's voice at the heart of Housing Services and build more trust in the service we offer.

- 1.3. Importantly, the Strategy also reaffirms our commitment to supporting our residents groups - and sets out some proposals to help us do this better. Tenants and residents associations and our wider participatory structure are an essential part of our resident engagement culture in Hackney - and we remain deeply indebted to all involved residents for their hard work in supporting residents, driving service improvements, and challenging us to do better.
- 1.4. Throughout the development of the Strategy, it was clear that residents who live in our homes had significant and often deep-seated concerns about how we communicate and engage with them. This was especially evident in the responses we received from our major survey of tenants and residents (STAR) in 2021, where only 35% of respondents were satisfied that the Council listens to their views and acts upon them. From focus groups and responses to our surveys, it was equally clear that it is residents' day-to-day experience of our services - whether a phone is answered promptly or a repair is completed on time - that drives satisfaction with engagement, and that too often we have not got the basics right.
- 1.5. In shaping the overall direction of this work we consequently took a decision at an early stage that the Strategy needed to take a whole service approach to address these issues. This is because any engagement strategy that did not put a strong focus on changing the culture of Housing Services, or addressing wider issues related to poor communication and follow-up of residents' concerns would lack credibility - and would not help us move the service forward. In implementing the Strategy we recognise that there will be an ongoing need to embed its principles across the service, empower and train our staff to engage more effectively, build stronger partnerships with our voluntary and community sector and partner agencies, and to monitor our progress openly and in partnership with residents.
- 1.6. We recognise that our plans to strengthen engagement are ambitious in the context of the immense financial challenges that Housing Services, and the Council as a whole, faces. The introduction of the Government's rent cap will significantly reduce our ability to invest in our homes and meet the needs of our housing residents, many of whom are already struggling due to the cost of living crisis. However, it is arguable that this makes it more, not less, important that we use the strategy to focus on those issues that matter most to our residents and to shape our improvement journey. While we will not be able to do everything at once, it offers us a much clearer framework to prioritise our resources and monitor our progress.

- 1.7. In developing the Strategy, significant effort has been made to engage residents who are involved in the participatory structures as well as those not currently engaged and those from Hackney's seldom heard communities. This is detailed in the Strategy and I am pleased that there has been such a high level of resident input. I thank all those that have given up their time to participate. I would also especially like to thank the two Resident Liaison Group (RLG) Co-Chairs who acted as project champions for this work and provided guidance, ideas and challenge throughout the process
- 1.8. I commend this Strategy to the Cabinet and hope that your service areas will work with us to help implement it.

## 2. **Group Director's introduction**

- 2.1. The report seeks endorsement for a new Resident Engagement Strategy to guide the work of Housing Services over the next three years.
- 2.2. The Strategy provides a clear set of strategic priorities and principles to guide our approach to resident engagement and will support our wider program to modernise Housing Services and respond to the new regulatory requirements for social housing set out in the Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper, November 2020). Following the challenges posed by the pandemic and cyberattack, it will offer a clear framework to reset our relationship with residents and restore residents' trust and confidence in Housing Services.
- 2.3. As the Strategy is a whole service strategy for Housing Services, it is vital that there is service-wide ownership of its priorities and principles - and a shared commitment to its effective implementation at senior level. To achieve this implementation of the Strategy will be supported by a detailed action plan, with progress monitored by both the Housing Services Management Team and the Resident Liaison Group. We will additionally be looking to work closely with other parts of the Council, residents, partner agencies and voluntary and community sector partners to realise the full scope of our ambitions.

## 3. **Recommendations**

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- 3.1. **Approve the new Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy as attached at Appendix 1 of this report.**
- 3.2. **Approve delegation to the Strategic Director of Housing Services in order to oversee the effective implementation of Strategy and to make any minor amendments to the Strategy and its associated policies.**

## 4. **Reason(s) for decision**

- 4.1. Housing Services have not had a Resident Engagement Strategy in place since 2013. Since this time there have been significant changes, both in our

local housing context and nationally, which we need to respond to. These include:

- **Changes in social housing tenure patterns** - there is now much greater diversity of tenure on Hackney's estates, with tenants increasingly living alongside leaseholders, homeowners, private renters and shared owners. This means we need to tailor communication and engagement to meet the needs of different groups of residents, and do more to ensure that all residents feel connected as places and communities change.

- **Changes in technology** - there are now many more ways that we can communicate with each other, with the growth of digital forms of communication such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Zoom etc, offering new options. In future, we will need to take full advantage of digital engagement - but offer different options (and support) to those unable to engage in this way.

- **High levels of needs, reducing resources** - residents living in Hackney managed homes have different circumstances, characteristics, and life experiences. But the high concentration of older people and single person and low income households in social housing means that our residents are more likely to experience financial hardship, social isolation and poor health, and the cost of living crisis will be exacerbating problems for many. This means we need to develop stronger partnerships with residents, other services and the voluntary and community sector to develop more estate-based initiatives which can address the wider socio-economic challenges our residents face. With the rent cap and soaring inflation putting pressure on our ability to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents and invest in our homes, we also need a framework that helps us to focus on the issues that matter most to residents, to support those who are most vulnerable, and do more to involve residents living in our homes in our decision-making process.

- **Major changes in housing legislation** - The Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper), has significant implications for how we listen to, and engage with, our residents. The Charter highlights the need for greater transparency, openness and accountability between landlords and residents, and puts a strong focus on listening to, and acting upon, the resident's voice, including the right to 'To have your voice heard by your landlord'. The reintroduction of housing inspection will mean that our approach to resident engagement will be subject to increased regulatory scrutiny.

4.2. These issues, along with the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic and cyberattack, mean that we need to review how we engage, take action to engage (more) residents effectively, and build on work already underway to promote stronger and more cohesive communities on our estates. A clearer strategic framework is needed to achieve these broad aims and support the services wider work to modernise and improve Housing Services.

## 5. **Details of alternative options considered and rejected**

- 5.1. **Do nothing** - this option was rejected as it would not provide a clear direction for our approach to resident engagement across Housing Services.

## 6. **Background**

### Developing the Strategy

- 6.1. A proposal to develop a new Resident Engagement Strategy for Housing Services and the approach to this work was agreed by the Housing Services Management Team (HSMT) in February 2021. From the outset, we wanted to work in partnership with residents to 'co-produce' the Strategy, to ensure that it reflected feedback from a diverse range of resident voices, and to build upon good practice from within and outside the housing sector. We achieved this in different ways through the strategy development process:

#### *Governance arrangements*

- 6.2. The Strategy development process was overseen by a Project Champions Group, made up of the Resident Liaison Group (RLG) Co Chairs and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services and Resident Participation, alongside a wider Strategy Scrutiny Group bringing together officers and involved and uninvolved residents. Together these groups provided a sounding board across different stages of the strategy development process and helped us to identify different issues to explore, community groups that we could speak to, and the sort of questions we should ask residents (and how we should ask them).

#### *Resident and Staff Consultation*

- 6.3. We used a variety of different methods to seek views from residents and staff, including focus groups, major surveys, and outreach to residents via local community and faith groups. This meant that we gathered some statistically reliable information alongside detailed comments and discussion notes which provided more in-depth insight into residents' concerns and views. Our evidence base included:

- 953 responses to the resident engagement survey on the Council's engagement platform Commonplace
- 6,457 responses to our bi-annual STAR resident satisfaction survey which included specific questions about participation and engagement
- Informal feedback from residents in parks or in community halls
- 12 focus groups with Housing staff, young residents, older residents and residents with learning disabilities
- 6 focus groups plus 13 121 interviews with residents from different communities including Turkish, Kurdish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Somali, and Charedi residents, with 122 seldom heard residents engaged directly

- Learning from a good practice review, including learning from other Council strategies and plans

*Using the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) ‘Re-Engineering Engagement Framework’*

- 6.4. Analysis of the feedback and issues raised in the first phases of work, helped us to identify a number of key themes and issues that the Strategy needed to address:
- Strengthening participation, promoting engagement
  - Improving communication and working together
  - Building stronger communities
- 6.5. A series of TPAS-led workshops with staff and residents were then held to consider what needed to change to strengthen engagement, drawing upon the TPAS framework for re-engineering engagement. These sessions helped us think through how we could improve leadership, communication, structures and processes to deliver better outcomes for residents and informed the five strategic priorities and range of actions within a draft Strategy.

*Consultation on the draft Resident Engagement Strategy*

- 6.6. A 12-week consultation on the draft Strategy took place between 9 June and 4 September 2022. This provided more opportunities for residents and other stakeholders to give us feedback on the priorities and actions proposed. Over this period:
- 478 residents completed a short survey asking their views, with 65% of respondents not currently engaged via formal residents groups. 69% of respondents were council tenants and leaseholders.
  - We sought views from residents who attended seven roadshows held on estates across the borough, and via re-engagement with seldom heard groups we had consulted in the discovery phase.
  - We held two sessions for Hackney councillors, with 18 councillors attending to give their views on the themes and proposals, ensuring that their understanding and experience of residents’ concerns and issues further shaped our thinking.
- 6.7. The response to the draft Strategy was positive, with over 90% of respondents to the survey expressing support for the five strategic priorities and related proposals. Comments and discussion reiterated many of the key messages from earlier engagement work with residents continuing to stress the need for better communication, listening and follow up from Housing Services, a more visible officer presence on our estates, and a wider range

of engagement options. The full consultation analysis is available as a separate report. **Appendix 2** provides a high level summary of some of the most frequent issues raised during our consultation and our response.

- 6.8. Importantly, while there was support for digital engagement, respondents were concerned about those who could not easily communicate in this way and wanted to ensure that there was a balanced approach. The need for this has since been reinforced by the Residents' Survey 2022; this found that while only 6% of Hackney residents do not have access to the internet, this proportion is significantly higher in those aged 65+ (33%), disabled residents (18%), social renters (9%) and those struggling financially (9%). We have therefore responded by amending the third priority so that digital engagement is not over-emphasised at the expense of other forms of communication.
- 6.9. As most of the remaining feedback was supportive of the priorities and related proposals, we have only made relatively minor changes to the draft Strategy. However, we are very clear from consultation feedback that there remains some scepticism about the Housing Services ability to deliver against the commitments made given the wider challenges facing the service. This underlines the need to ensure that delivery and implementation of the proposals is monitored closely, with our progress shared in an honest and open way with residents.

#### Policy Context

- 6.10. The Council's revised Community Strategy 2020-22 identifies five cross-cutting priorities, three of which will be directly supported by this Strategy:
1. A borough where residents and local businesses fulfil their potential and everyone enjoys the benefits of increased local prosperity and contributes to community life
  2. An open, cohesive, safer and supportive community
  3. A borough with healthy, active and independent residents
- 6.11. The Housing Services vision is to "Be Exceptional" and its priorities include: provide an excellent service for residents and colleagues; listen to residents and respond to their needs; and deliver exceptional customer experience. The Strategy will support these aims.
- 6.12. The Resident Engagement Strategy supports a number of priorities in other Council strategies and plans, especially the draft Hackney Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy 2022-26, the Young Futures Commission Report 2019, the Ageing Well Strategy 2020-2025, the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2021- 2031 and the Inclusive Economy Strategy 2019-25. A commitment to actively engage in work to deliver these plans is included in the Strategy.
- 6.13. At national level, the Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper, November 2022) will have significant implications for how we

listen to and engage with residents. Effective implementation of proposals in this Strategy will help us meet standards set by the Housing Regulator and Housing Ombudsman, with the performance of Housing Services to be subject to a statutory inspection on a four-yearly cycle.

#### Equality impact assessment

- 6.14. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Resident Engagement Strategy has been undertaken (and is included as **Appendix 3** of this report). As the Strategy will impact on all residents who live in homes managed by Housing Services and all staff who work in the service, it is likely it will impact on the lives of many people with one or more of the nine protected characteristics.
- 6.15. The EIA sets out the range of equality considerations that were taken into account during the development of the Strategy and the approach taken to involve a diverse range of residents. While the pandemic made contact with different community groups challenging in the early phase of the work, we successfully engaged a number of underrepresented groups during consultation to ensure that a wide range of voices were heard. Throughout the development process, we engaged directly with around 160 residents from our seldom-heard communities through 12 group sessions, 13 one-to-one interviews and 2 cultural events.
- 6.16. The Strategy commits to a wide range of actions which should have a positive impact on different equality groups, and on cohesion and good relations more generally. This includes work to invest more in digital training, give a great voice to young people through a new Housing Youth Panel, and promote more intergenerational activities. We will also focus on strengthening our approach to translation and interpretation by reviewing our approach in partnership with corporate communications and local voluntary and community groups, drawing more upon the language skills of staff across the service, and piloting new technology, such as handheld translation devices.

#### Consultations

- 6.17. As detailed in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.9 of this report, the development of the Strategy was based on an extensive programme of consultation with housing residents, including seldom heard groups.

#### Risk assessment

- 6.18. The key risks associated with the Resident Engagement Strategy are as follows:
- 6.19. **Operational/reputational** - our work on developing the Strategy has underlined that residents' perception of the Housing Services is strongly influenced by their day-to-day experience of the services they receive i.e whether repairs are completed in a timely way or calls answered promptly. If we do not get this right as a service, residents and other stakeholders may feel the Strategy is not credible, and may be reluctant to engage with us to



deliver some of the improvements. A continuous focus on improving the performance of frontline services and meeting agreed service standards will be vital to mitigate this risk.

- 6.20. **Operational** - There is a risk that staff and managers within the service will not embrace the resident focus that successful implementation of the Strategy requires, possibly due to workload issues or lack of effective engagement skills. Effective communication from service leaders, reinforced by regular training to embed new ways of working and support staff development, will be required to manage this risk. Where there are genuine barriers that slow progress on priorities, there will need to be open and honest communication to manage residents' expectations.
- 6.21. **Policy** - changes to the Social Housing Regulators' approach, and /or its Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, could lead to new demands which need to be resourced or built into the proposed approach. This will be monitored through the Charter for Social Housing Implementation Board, with any changes to the Resident Engagement Strategy Action Plan discussed with the Resident Liaison Group as required.
- 6.22. **Resources** - there is a risk that some residents may have unrealistic expectations about the ability to fund community projects and /or the level of support that can be provided to support and develop resident's groups. Housing Services, and the Council as a whole, is currently dealing with unparalleled financial pressures as a result of the pandemic and soaring inflation, with the cost of materials, labour, energy and fuel adding millions of pounds to our outgoings. The rent cap will in turn put immense strain on the housing revenue account, compounding earlier reductions in Government funding and making it much harder to meet the needs of our housing residents, many of whom are already struggling financially. While the Strategy proposals are designed to be delivered as far as possible as business as usual, financial pressures may consequently pose challenges that are not yet possible to predict and some re-prioritisation of our proposals may be essential. Effective and honest communication will be required to manage such expectations, alongside transparency in the allocation of participation resources.

## 7. Comments of the Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources.

- 7.1. The Resident Engagement Strategy will be contained within the existing budget.
- 7.2. It should also be noted that due to the increased need for savings to be made within the HRA, should the current resources be reduced, this would not be the case and may lead to re-prioritisation of activities in the future.

## 8. Comments of the Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services

- 8.1. The recommendations set out in part 3 of this report fall within the definition of a Key decision under the Councils Constitution.

- 8.2. A key decision is a Cabinet decision which is likely to:
- i) Result in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service or function to which the decisions relates, or
  - ii) Be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in An area comprising two or more wards in the area of the Council.
- 8.3. The recommendation set out in paragraph 3.1 is for Cabinet to approve the new Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy as attached at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 8.4. Currently the Mayor's scheme of delegation reserves to the Mayor and Cabinet approval of all corporate policies and strategies and all formal service strategies. In order for the Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy to be approved and implemented, the recommendation set out in Paragraph 3.1 is required to be approved by the Mayor and Cabinet.
- 8.5. In order for the Strategic Director of Housing Services to make any minor amendments to the Strategy and its associated policies, the recommendation in 3.2 requires approval by Mayor and Cabinet.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-25  
 Appendix 2 - Resident Engagement strategy - overview of main consultation messages  
 Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment Hackney Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2025

### **Exempt**

Not applicable.

### **Background documents**

 **Your Homes Your Voice Strategy Consultation Report - FINAL**

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