

Appendix A - Agenda Item 8 Questions from Members of the Council Not Responded to at The Meeting Due to Time Constraints.

8.5 From Cllr Walker to the Cabinet Member for Housing Services and Resident Participation

The Council's draft Resident Engagement Strategy (2022-25) has pledged to create a residents-first culture at the heart of our housing service. Following consultation, how will the strategy ensure resident voice and participation across different tenures to drive improvements and ensure that poverty, social isolation and poor health are tackled head-on?

Response

Dear Cllr Walker

Thank you for the question at Full Council regarding the Council's Resident Engagement Strategy. As we unfortunately ran out of time for me to answer your question in person at the meeting, I am sending you this written response.

The need for a Resident Engagement Strategy is clear. 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 in council leasehold properties 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.

A key aim of the strategy is to provide a clearer framework to drive improvements in how Housing Services engage and communicate with its residents, and to ensure that our approach reflects changes in our operating context - such as growing levels of need among our housing tenants, the increased use of digital engagement, our increased tenure complexity, and the proposed changes to the housing regulatory framework set out in the Government's Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper).

In developing the strategy we have worked 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 and consequently heard the views of thousands of residents who live in our homes, including feedback from seldom heard groups that we often struggle to reach.

The strategy sets out how we will engage with our residents on what services we deliver and any significant changes to existing services. The core of our approach is to work with residents to, where appropriate, co-produce significant changes to services we provide, a process of doing it **with** residents rather than residents feeling things are done to them.

A key part of that will be reaching out and engaging with all Housing Services residents regardless of tenure, based upon the service-specific issue. For example, we would not engage with tenants regarding services solely to leaseholders and visa versa.

With regards to tackling head-on the issues facing some of our most vulnerable residents, we have a number of key approaches that we deploy to support residents. Our Financial Inclusion team are:

- Working with residents to maximise income and dealing with benefits issues and referrals to debt advice.
- We also support residents to resolve benefits issues and liaise with our colleagues at Housing Benefit to address these.
- We have developed and continue to undertake a number of Discretionary Housing Payment campaigns to support tenants to sustain their tenancies.
- We are working with the homelessness team to help residents access the extra support from the government's household support fund.

This work delivers direct benefits for residents, and through maximising income since the beginning of the pandemic we have seen almost £2m in additional benefits for our residents.

Finally, to ensure residents can access our services, we are introducing local Housing Surgeries in the community, taking the service closer to residents. A pilot is underway and these surgeries will be rolled out across all housing areas in the new year.

I hope that this response is helpful, but if you have any further questions regarding the strategy please do come back to me.

Kind regards

Cllr Clayeon McKenzie

8.6 From Cllr Desmond to the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Delivery, Inclusive Economy & Regeneration

Hackney Downs Councillors have been campaigning to protect Kidzmania children's soft play centre, which is threatened by development by Peabody Housing Association. How can the Council help protect this popular centre and persuade Peabody to adapt their plans to ensure it survives and prospers?

Response

Dear Cllr Desmond

Thank you for the question you tabled at Full Council asking how the Council can assist in resolving the current impasse between Kidzmania and Peabody Housing Association. It was unfortunate that time was not on our side and I was

unable to respond in the meeting but please find the following written response.

First, may I take this opportunity to acknowledge your and Cllr Sem Moema's consistent support for Kidzmania, a well-established, well-liked and exciting Hackney based children's play venue.

As you are both aware, for some time now Kidzmania have been negotiating commercial terms for the use of a new premises with the owner, Peabody Housing Association. The new building is a mixed-use development with twenty-one affordable homes and a ground floor commercial space. The original planning permission that was granted by the Council ensured that the ground floor commercial space could include in Planning Use Class terms, the provision of a children's play centre.

Since planning permission was originally granted various building safety regulations have been introduced affecting all new buildings. These new regulations were mainly focussed on fire and building safety matters. As a result of the new building safety legislation the Peabody development required some amendments to the original permission granted. These changes were approved by the Council but it did not change the material planning permission regarding its possible future use as a children's play centre.

It must be noted that from a legal perspective, the long running negotiations between Peabody and Kidzmania is a commercial negotiation between third parties that are completely separate from, and independent of, the Council and the planning process. In addition Planning law prohibits the Council from granting planning permission to any third parties other than the applicant. It cannot identify and make it a condition of planning, a named third party end user of a development. It is only able to specify the types of use of a building and as I have already said - the Council has delivered on this by ensuring that a children's play centre would be a permitted use of this space.

As it stands the Council has no legal grounds for intervention either through the Planning process or through any other statutory function to impose a contractual conclusion to the current impasse. Neither can the Council involve itself in a commercial negotiation between two third parties in which it has no corporate interest in. For information the Council does not commission any children's services from Kidzmania.

However, Hackney has a strong track record in working with local partners, organisations and businesses from many sectors to reach a resolution on a range of matters. Council officers have contacted Peabody on this matter, the outcome of which is that a further negotiation will now take place between Peabody and Kidzmania. The Council understands that the date is yet to be confirmed but it has learnt that this meeting is likely to happen in December.

At this stage I would therefore suggest that we let the planned negotiation get underway but we will ensure that the Council maintains close contact with both parties and wields as much influence as can be considered both suitable and legal.

Please be reassured that all support your and Cllr Moema's ambitions and let us hope that both parties can reach an agreement through this latest negotiation. As you have often said this is a much loved facility that provides a popular play destination for Hackney families and I am sure that an agreement between Kidzmania and Peabody would be a welcome Christmas present for many in these pretty tough times.

Regards

Cllr Guy Nicholson

8.7 From Cllr Ogundemuren to the Cabinet Member for Employment, Human Resources and Equalities

Given the cost of living crisis, public sector workers need a pay rise. Can the Cabinet Member give an update on the 2022 / 2023 pay claim made by the unions and when does she expect staff to see an increase?

Response

Dear Cllr Ogundemuren

Thank you for the question at Full Council regarding the public sector pay claim. As we unfortunately ran out of time for me to answer your question in person at the meeting, I am sending you this written response.

We know that the cost of living crisis is hitting our staff, particularly the lowest-paid, in the same way as it affects our residents (including those who are both).

For employees in local government and schools, pay is determined by a negotiating body, the National Joint Council (NJC) for local government services. This is more commonly known as the National Employer. Individual local authorities are not responsible for determining pay locally.

The process for deciding on the pay claim is one that requires a great deal of negotiation. What is clear is that public sector workers, including our staff, won't get the pay rise they deserve until the government puts their hands in their pockets and starts to value the staff who keep this country running.

The National Employer is responsible for determining pay for local government workers and this year made a pay offer to the three trade unions of £1,925. Following the trade unions consulting with their membership, two of them accepted this offer and one did not. When the National Employer met with the trade unions on 1 November 2022, two of the unions agreed and signed off the pay award as it is done on a majority basis.

As we are an 'Inner London Borough', Hackney Council officers receive an historical 'Inner London weighting' element to their pay which normally gets adjusted by the percentage of the pay award agreed. As this year, the pay award was for a fixed amount of £1,925, a further £430 was added to this amount by the Regional Employer (London Councils). Therefore, the full amount of pay award for full time employees was £2,355, which amounts to around a 10% pay rise for the lowest paid. This is pro rata for part time employees, based on the number of hours they work.

Following agreement of the Green Book pay award, staff received their back pay on 15 November. As the award took effect from 1 April, this meant that staff received a lump sum of over £1,000 back pay this month, in addition to their monthly wages.

Red Book staff (craft and associated employees) have had to wait slightly longer, but I am happy to say their deal has been approved, and the increase will be implemented in the December 2022 pay run so that the money is with these staff by Christmas. The delay is unfortunate, and whilst we can all accept that there is a need to push the government to take responsibility and fund higher public sector pay, we've all got a duty to ensure that those on the lowest and intermediate pay scales are given their increases in a timely manner. The Red Book pay award is £1,925 and the historical 'Inner London Weighting' element to take their pay increases this by £112 making a the full amount of the pay award for Red Book employees £2,037.

We are also taking other measures to support staff through the cost of living crisis. We have an internal comms campaign targeted at staff on the lowest and intermediate incomes, and are promoting our wellbeing offer including the Employee Assistance Programme which can also offer financial advice. We are continuing to highlight existing benefits for permanent staff including Salary Finance loans for high-interest debt, the Tenancy Deposit Scheme and Wagestream, which offers early access to salary payments in the event of urgent need. We also have a range of staff discounts for supermarkets, as well as local discounts throughout Hackney.

I hope that this response is helpful, but if you have any further questions please do come back to me.

Kind regards

Cllr Carole Williams

8.8 From Cllr Oguzkanli to the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member give assurances that the Council will work with partners and stakeholders to make sure that the future of St Leonard's hospital remains a fully comprehensive health service aimed at providing much-needed health services in Hackney?

Response

Dear Cllr Oguskanli

Thank you for the question at Full Council regarding the future of St Leonards. As we unfortunately ran out of time for me to answer your question in person at the meeting, I am sending you this written response.

St Leonards is currently owned and managed by NHS Property Services (NHSPS). NHSPS do not have any plans to change the usage of the site so there are no immediate risks to the site as a provider of NHS services. That said, the current arrangement also means that there is a lost opportunity to maximise the benefit of what is a large and well-situated site within Hackney, within the context of population growth and increasing demand for health services.

The existing provision at the site is a GP surgery and outpatient departments including sexual health services, podiatry, rehabilitation services, talking therapies and wheelchair services - whilst there is much going on, I would not describe it as "a fully comprehensive health service" Famously saved from complete closure by a public campaign in the 1980s, the building ceased to function as a General Hospital in 1984 and the services currently provided there are those of what we would now call a health centre rather than a hospital.

Both the Council and Homerton Healthcare have scoped various options for improving the site and would ideally want to bring the site under local management and control.

In 2019 the Council, Homerton, what was the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHSPS facilitated a viability exercise to explore whether improving the healthcare facilities on site might be achievable by including housing on site to create income that could be reinvested. Unfortunately the exercise concluded that such a project would not be financially viable.

Louise Ashley, CEO Homerton Healthcare and City and Hackney system lead was asked about St Leonard's at the Health in Hackney Scrutiny Commission on November 16th 2022. She confirmed that Homerton Healthcare, under NHS rules, has the ability to take the site over from NHS Property Services.

Homerton have formally started the process to test feasibility for taking on St Leonards, an approach which the Council are supporting. The Homerton submitted an Expression of Interest regarding a potential asset transfer to the Department for Health & Social Care (DHSC), which was approved in October 2021. The approval gave the Homerton access to the site documentation and financials held by NHSPS, which enabled them to commence work on a full 'Business Case' which will detail the financial viability of the site, the costs to manage the backlog of maintenance and the ongoing schedule of works.

If Homerton Healthcare were to take over the site, they would then take on all of the associated maintenance and other costs of the building. The site has suffered from years of decline, so these costs are likely to be considerable. Several buildings are in a state of disrepair, with some areas locked off and marked as dilapidated. There is a considerable maintenance backlog and work is required to bring the site back up to the standards of a modern healthcare facility. Due to the age and nature of the site, it is expensive to maintain, and the Homerton has to operate within strict capital spending limits set by the government.

Early findings suggest that the costs of running the site will outstrip any income received from running services or rent from other tenants and make it unaffordable for the Homerton as a single owner to operate the premises. Homerton would, understandably, not be able to take on St Leonards if it was unaffordable. They are, however, exploring all options to try and make it feasible, and are currently progressing land value assessments to examine all the possibilities that the site may have to generate inherent value, to support the business case.

Council officers meet regularly with the Homerton to explore partnership options on the site. Our intention in that work is to be sure that we do not inadvertently miss an opportunity that might work with the input of both parties to make more of the site should it arise. Right now it is hard to see how that might come about, but regular dialogue meanwhile only helps to build stronger mutual understanding and so strengthens the working partnership.

It is worth repeating that, outside of the potential asset transfer to the Homerton, there are no plans for NHSPS to change the current usage of the site, and it will continue to provide NHS community services as it currently does. Likewise, local partners will continue to work with NHSPS to try and improve the current condition of the site as far as possible.

I hope that this response is helpful, but if you have any further questions please do come back to me.

Kind regards, Chris

Cllr Chris Kennedy