Resident Involvement in Housing Scrutiny Commission – Draft Recommendations

The terms of reference of this housing scrutiny commission focus on improving housing services to residents through resident involvement strategies. An implicit focus of the commission’s work was to identify ways to support a culture where resident “feedback is valued” and systemically embedded into service improvement.

These recommendations are for Lambeth Housing Management (LHM) but will also be reported to local housing associations with the expectation that all housing providers in the borough will work together to achieve our common goals, as well as continuing to adhere to the Lambeth Social Housing Charter.

Principles
1. To embed resident involvement in Lambeth housing services through the following principles:

   - Co-operative co-regulation. Co-regulation is an approach which enables achievement of the housing regulatory framework ‘Consumer Standards’; these apply to all registered providers including local authorities. Co-regulation is defined by the Chartered Institute of Housing as “an approach where housing organisations’ frameworks for directing, accounting for, monitoring, assessing and modifying their own behaviour and performance are based on residents’ priorities, views, and engagement with relevant processes”. Elected Councillors are also bound by these principles;
   - Empowering residents through co-production. Co-production can be defined as starting without a fixed outcome in mind, having a diverse set of people contributing their views and ensuring that everyone understands the constraints, resulting in participants having ownership of the end product;
   - Recognising that there is no “one size fits all” solution and thus it is important to have a range of structures and mechanisms – both fixed and flexible – to facilitate resident involvement;
   - Rigorous use of data, intelligence and insight to inform improvement, engagement and involvement; and,
   - Value for money – resident involvement has been shown not only to drive up satisfaction but also to lead to savings.

Placing residents at the heart of the service
Embedding the principles articulated above through a range of outcomes:

2. Increase and facilitate resident engagement in housing and the wider community by enhancing personal skills (e.g. training in chairing meetings, confidence building, taking part in committees, managing budgets).

3. Increase and facilitate resident involvement so that it is embedded in the delivery of housing services. This will include policy development, relevant decision-making and
the scrutiny of performance. Such activities will utilise skills people already have and develop further skills connected to the roles in question (e.g. in contract management, procurement panels for contractors and sub-contractors, complaints processes including the review of Council decisions).

4. Training to support Recommendations 2 and 3 should be made available and accredited wherever possible. Training should be done cooperatively (i.e. jointly with officers if appropriate) to develop shared understanding of issues and solutions.

5. A range of recruitment incentives for resident engagement and involvement should be developed. These should be co-produced with tenants and leaseholders and be subject to feedback and review to ensure they are effective.

6. Budgets should be identified to support Recommendations 2-5.

7. A strategy for involving those residents that are not named tenants, such as young adults, to be developed that would encourage engagement in the above outcomes.

**Improving satisfaction and value for money**

8. Training should be run jointly (with housing officers/ housing associations and/or other groups as appropriate) wherever possible in order that resources are pooled and opportunities for identifying cross-cutting solutions are maximised.

9. All key performance indicators (KPIs), mandatory and non-mandatory, which are used to measure the performance of housing services should be benchmarked locally and/or nationally. Where possible, non-mandatory KPIs should be co-produced with residents and reviewed annually. All KPIs should be presented in a range of formats (i.e. written/ visual/ graphical), to be developed by a cooperative working group, in order to ensure they are accessible and user-friendly.

**Smarter working: improving use of data, intelligence and insight**

10. Performance data should be open and transparent, readily accessible and available to residents to interrogate and use as they see fit. Training should be provided to facilitate this.

11. Systems used to collect and store data should be joined up, including aggregating with other relevant publicly available data (such as indices of multiple deprivation), in order to build a more sophisticated picture of local circumstances and challenges, and target resources effectively. This will involve working across the council as relevant data will sometimes be held by departments other than housing.

12. Estate walkabouts led by officers should take place regularly to help add context to raw data. This should be done in a systematic way, ensuring all areas are covered and feedback is captured in order that it can be cross-referenced with the available data and further develop intelligence. Processes and mechanisms (such as varied dates and times) to be co-produced to enable clear responsive action.
13. The use of social media should be increased to extend the reach of engagement/involvement beyond traditional mechanisms such as meetings and phone/paper surveys, particularly in relation to younger, diverse and/or excluded residents.

14. In order to assist achievement of Recommendation 13, a social media engagement strategy should be co-produced with younger residents. This could also involve the Youth Council and/or Young Lambeth Cooperative.

**Striving for excellence**

15. The Commission recognises it is Lambeth Housing Management’s aim to be “one of the best housing management services in London” (Lambeth Living Delivery Plan 2015/16, p2). This should be evidenced and benchmarked in both the short and long term.

16. LHM should continue to exceed the housing consumer standards and, in the longer term, aim to achieve the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Resident Involvement Accreditation for Landlords.

**Organisational culture and ethos**

17. In addition to embedding the principles set out in Recommendation 1, LHM should at all times follow the cooperative behaviours, which form the basis for staff appraisal in the Council, particularly with regard to ‘supporting learning and development’ (level 3) and ‘thinking strategically and creating clarity’ (levels 1-4).

18. LHM should follow all relevant recommendations contained within the July 2015 Community Engagement Cabinet Review conducted by the Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Customer Access (and the associated toolkit).

19. Joined up working should be encouraged at all levels. This should involve LHM working closely with other areas of the council as well as other housing providers and community/voluntary groups in the borough, to ensure residents receive as coherent, consistent and cost effective a service as possible.

**Mechanisms and structures**

To enable achievement of the above principles and outcomes, and to sustain their implementation, visible accountability is required – thus:

20. There should be a variety of involvement structures, both fixed and flexible, to accommodate the skills, needs and appetite of a wide range of residents. These could be existing or new and might include:

- alignment with the Lambeth 500 scheme that seeks to identify residents willing to get involved for short-term and long-term problem solving;
• Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations (TRAs): these are the bedrock of resident involvement and should be supported and promoted. Every resident should be able to join a TRA; to this end street properties and small “orphaned” estates should either be connected virtually to create their own TRA or linked in with other local TRAs, depending on the views of the residents in question;

• area structures, which would have devolved powers in terms of agenda setting and possibly budgets/grants. It would be beneficial for these groups to have links with existing structures to ensure good use of resources (for example, the five-neighbourhood structure where each neighbourhood has a lead councillor who acts as a coordinator);

• borough-wide mechanisms for communication to be considered and co-produced if necessary;

• running alongside the more formal structures should be more flexible structures such as task and finish groups and scrutiny panels. Scrutiny panels should be time and scope limited with independence, power and formality. Each report should go to the head of service, and other relevant decision-making forums; a response must be mandatory; and,

• Councillors and independent co-optees with expertise should be on scrutiny panels if required.

21. Consideration should be given to links with residents in housing associations for the purpose of sharing good practice and training (i.e. widening of the TRA network, scrutiny training).

22. The commission envisages levels of involvement as follows:

• Level 0: communication and access to information in a regular and accessible form;

• Level 1: involvement at a local level (e.g. in a TRA), including becoming a chair or treasurer, or participation in a local working group;

• Level 2: involvement in a time-limited task and finish group looking at a specific issue (e.g. selection of contractors, repairs, complaints, and procurement processes). These may be borough-wide or area-based and should produce outcomes that are co-produced and responded to by relevant housing managers and/or Councillors; and,

• Level 3: involvement in scrutiny, policy reviews and performance management, borough-wide and/or area-based.

Levels 2 and 3 would require specialist skills and hence a filtering process should be developed; a skills audit of residents would also be beneficial and should be co-produced.

23. The above recommendations are to be aligned with the business processes of Lambeth Housing Management (and the Council more widely as appropriate) and also considered in relation to the requirements of the Resident Participation Compact.