



City of Westminster

Cabinet Member Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Housing - Councillor David Harvey
Date:	January 18 2022
Classification:	General release
Title:	Review of Westminster City Council's resident engagement structure
Wards Affected:	All wards
Financial Summary:	N/A
Report of:	Neil Wightman – Director of Housing

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Cabinet Member previously approved a proposed change of resident engagement approach in principle, subject to consultation with residents.
- 1.2. Residents have now been consulted (Appendix 2) and their feedback considered (Appendix 3).
- 1.3. Overall the proposed changes are supported by the residents who responded to the consultation. Therefore, Cabinet Member approval is now sought to communicate the outcome of the consultation and for the implementation of the new resident engagement structures.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Cabinet Member approves implementation of the proposed approach to resident engagement for 2022-25 (Appendix 1) by way of a statement of decision.

Over the coming months the planned approach to implementation would involve working step by step with involved residents to pilot Local Briefings, revitalise our email survey group (Westminster Housing Online), and establish the Policy and Performance Group. Residents on the Policy and Performance Group would then help prioritise topics or projects to be undertaken by future working groups.

2.2. That the Cabinet Member approves the content of the Consultation Findings Report for communication with residents and other stakeholders (Appendix 3).

3. Reasons for Decision

3.1. To allow implementation of robust and flexible new formal resident engagement options that will facilitate effective consultation with residents on the housing service, and

3.2. To allow communication of the consultation outcome and planned approach to residents and other stakeholders.

4. Background, including Policy Context

4.1. Between 2016 – 2019 Westminster Council, and formerly City West Homes (CWH) delivered formal resident engagement via four area panels reporting to a resident council. When the Council brought the housing service back in house it made a commitment to continue engaging with its tenants and leaseholders on the future provision of housing management services and how these services can improve. Towards the end of 2019 area-based approach was reviewed by external consultants. Residents were consulted on their recommended changes.

4.2. A decision was then made to pause implementation and over the following months the operating context changed substantially because of Covid19. The housing service learned many lessons during the Council's Covid19 emergency response. Considering that learning, what has worked well in the past, and the emerging requirements of the social housing green/white paper a further review of formal resident engagement was carried out.

4.3. To deliver effective resident engagement in the changed context it was proposed that the Council replace the area-based hierarchical panels with a grass roots topic-based engagement framework that offers a wider range of engagement options that are agile and open to all. This would allow residents to get involved in ways that work for them, on issues that interest them and would empower local resident groups by removing the additional overlapping layer of area-based panels.

4.4. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard requires us to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the development of housing related policies, strategic priorities, decision making, service standards, performance monitoring, management practice, and local offers. The standard requires that tenants are consulted at least once every three years on the best way to involve them in the governance and monitoring of the housing management service. The standard also requires that we demonstrate how we respond to tenants' diverse needs in the way we provide services and communicate.

4.5. The Social Housing White Paper (The Charter for Social Housing Residents) makes clear that there will be greater regulatory focus on the regulatory consumer

standards including the existing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. Chapter 5 of the white paper (To have your voice heard by your landlord) sets out additional expectations around resident engagement including the need for landlords to evidence that they are seeking out best practice, ensuring that engagement is transparent and accessible, and tackling loneliness. There is also an expectation that landlords will tailor their engagement approach to their resident's needs and offer a wide range of ways to get involved such as surveys, focus groups, and scrutiny panels. Having reviewed the white paper in detail we are confident that our proposed approach delivers full compliance.

- 4.6. Westminster's City for All strategy and the Vibrant Communities workstream included an aim to implement new formal resident engagement arrangements, incorporating learning from methods adopted during COVID19.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. The new approach is cost neutral and can be delivered using existing approved budgets for resident engagement.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. There are a range of statutory and regulatory standards that the Council's engagement framework should comply with.
- 6.2. The Council is obliged by sections 105 of the Housing Act 1985 to consult with secure tenants on matters of housing management such as changes to policy and practice, maintenance, improvement, or demolition of council homes, or changes in the provision of related amenities. This obligation is extended to introductory tenants by section 137 of the Housing Act 1996. There is a requirement to inform tenants of proposed changes and consider feedback before acting. There is also a requirement to publish details of the arrangements the Council makes to comply with this obligation.
- 6.3. Part B section 6 of the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code recommends consultation with a relevant resident panel on complaints policies and procedures and that a relevant resident panel receive reports on feedback, learning, and improvements arising from the complaints process.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 there is a requirement to encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low. The proposed approach has been developed to facilitate compliance with this obligation.
- 7.2. An EqIA has been completed (Appendix 4) on the proposed change of approach. The change will create a wider range of ways to get involved. These options have

been developed to suit the circumstances of a wider range of residents, making it easier for more people to get involved in a way that works for them. No potentially negative differential effects on people with protected characteristics were identified regarding the proposed change.

8. Staffing Implications

- 8.1. The proposed change has no staffing implications and takes account of the ongoing reorganisation of the housing department.

9. Communications Implications

- 9.1. A decision to approve the new approach is required before we can communicate with residents and other stakeholders about the outcome of the consultation and our implementation plan (Appendix 3).

10. Consultation

- 10.1. Consultation with residents on the proposed change of approach has been extensive.
- 10.2. Interested ward members and involved residents joined workshops to review the proposals and the consultation materials when they were being developed.
- 10.3. All resident households were posted a leaflet detailing the proposals (Appendix 2) and we also promoted the proposals by email, text and online. The consultation ran for 4 weeks with opportunities for residents to provide feedback by post or online, attend webinars to find out more, or call for individual help over the phone. Our aim was to make it easy for residents to provide their feedback, to maximise participation, and ensure the views collected were representative of all Westminster housing residents.
- 10.4. A total of 1,677 consultation responses were received with the majority supporting the change of approach saying it would make it easier and more likely for them to get involved (Appendix 3).

If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact:

Henry Roffey – Resident Engagement Manager (hroffey@westminster.gov.uk)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A:

Other Implications

Appendix 1:

Proposed Formal Engagement Structure

Appendix 2:

Consultation Leaflet

Appendix 3:

Consultation Findings Report

Appendix 4:

EqIA

Appendix 5:

Previous Formal Engagement Structure

Other Implications

1. Resources Implications

None identified.

2. Business Plan Implications

The proposal supports the business plan objectives as set out in section 4 above.

3. Risk Management Implications

None identified.

4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications

None identified.

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

None identified.

6. Impact on the Environment

None identified.

7. Human Rights Implications

None identified.

8. Energy Measure Implications

None identified.

For completion by the **Cabinet Member** for *(add portfolio title)*

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: _____

State nature of interest if any

.....
(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

.....and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed

Cabinet Member for *(add portfolio title)*

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should

take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.