

You are invited to attend

# **LB Southwark Resident Involvement Review Panel – Meeting 8 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018 6pm**

*Objective of meeting: Panel considers digital involvement*

## **AGENDA**

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Meeting 7 Summary and Decision Table
3. Draft Report
4. Strategic Discussion Paper
5. Issues of Contention or Omission:
  - a. Elections
  - b. Whether 7 days is enough notice for TRA/Community meetings
  - c. Inclusion of young people
6. Next Steps

## Chairs Briefing – Meeting Eight

Welcome to the final meeting of the Resident Involvement Review Panel. Attached are the summary and decision table from the last meeting, along with an updated draft report. The draft report, as before, contains decisions made by the Panel alongside notes of our discussions.

Our main discussion will be around the strategic bodies. Previously we have set out expectations for any strategic body and at our last meeting discussed, without consensus, the balance of cross-tenure and single tenure approaches. The papers covers in a little more detail how each of the three options might work, and coverage of how they meet the need for both cross-tenure and single tenure involvement.

The final report will record our discussions and any views fairly.

There is a final opportunity to raise any issues of contention or omission. These include elections, which was agreed by the Panel as a criteria for any strategic body. There has been challenge to this about a skills basis, being seen as a rival to elections for Councillors and whether this would lead to the approach sought by the Panel. Additionally I'm sensitive to unintended outcomes with regards to diversity.

Additional points include issues raised by the Sounding Board and Panel around the 7 days notice for meetings being too short and the inclusion of young people.

Following the meeting I will produce a final draft of the Report for circulation over the Christmas period with any final comments on content due by 2<sup>nd</sup> January. I will then submit the Report on 3<sup>rd</sup> January.

I would like to thank all Panel members for their help, insight and tolerance throughout the Reviews.

## Meeting Seven Summary Note

- Mark Morris (Home Owner)
- Teresa Fritz (Home Owner)
- Ina Negotia (Home Owners Council)
- Liz Errington (Home Owners Council)
- Omalara Daniels (Tenant)
- Hilary Dobson (MYSHOB)
- Zahra Gaed (Southwark Youth Council)
- Sharron Smith (Officer)
- John McCormack (Officer)
- Eva Gomez (Officer)
- Emily Nice (Officer)
- Phil Morgan (Chair)

## Apologies

- Hayley Zoil (Tenant)

The Panel agreed the summary note and decision table from Meeting 5 with one agreed change around the efficient use of funding and the summary note and decision table from Meeting 6. The Panel considered briefly the draft report and noted that this will feature at the final meeting next week, along with any outstanding issues of omission or contention.

The Panel to considered and agreed four points relating to local involvement:

- That digital training be considered for TRAs and communities in the proposed Communities or Strategic Funds. The Panel noted that there was free digital training in Southwark libraries.
- That supporting TRAs and Community Groups on their engagement with residents impacted by welfare reform is welcome and should form part of the topics to be covered in training provided for TRAs and funding considered for TRAs and Community Groups. The Panel received a paper from David Eyles (HomeOwners Council & Rotherhithe Area Housing Forum) on disabled residents. It covered cuts in Government funding to the Council, benefit changes and the profound impact on residents affected. The paper pointed out the knock-on effect on TRAs and community groups and argued for information and support for those impacted by changes. The Smith Institute have recently published [Safe as Houses 2](#), detailing the increase in rent arrears for Southwark residents on Universal Credit. The Panel noted the importance of signposting in any training or guidance shared with TRAs and Community Groups and other sources of support.
- The Panel acknowledged that there were other residents who are not General Needs (Temporary Accommodation, Sheltered and Extra Care Housing, Supported Hostels and Travellers) who should be part of future involvement approaches.
- That the Council should support TRAs being set up where this is wanted by residents.

The Panel considered further how the five new Housing Forums might work. They supported the idea that the agenda should be resident driven with polls conducted of residents on topics for the meeting. They also supported the opportunity for networking. A possible draft agenda might include:

- Key Performance Indicators
- Ad hoc polls for top two topics to be discussed
- Red Button issues
- Complaints summary
- You Said We Did feedback from previous meeting
- Networking opportunity
- 'Sandpit' session before the meeting to raise individual issues

The Panel noted that advocacy services might be needed to support residents who do not have English as a first language.

The Panel noted that if Local Housing Networks are held quarterly there will be 20 meetings per year compared to the current 96 Area Housing Forums each year. This releases a considerable level of resource to support the new involvement opportunities.

The Panel also briefly discussed Tenant and Resident Associations, issues around exclusion of homeowners and including street properties in existing TRAs were possible. This could be covered in the proposed review of the constitution of TRAs.

Following challenge from the Sounding Board the Panel agreed the following:

- The inclusion of a question on future surveys about “does your landlord listen to you and act on your views?” This could be supported by questions through digital involvement.
- That the Code of Conduct is reviewed both to ensure it is robust and able to be implemented effectively to prevent inappropriate behaviour.

The Panel then moved onto the main discussion around strategic bodies and funding. The Panel noted its previous agreement to set up a range of working groups and opportunities to be involved, and that involvement should be open to all tenants and homeowners and principles for any strategic group that is formed.

Ina Negoita spoke to the presentation prepared by the Homeowners Council and highlighted the following issues:

- Enthusiasm from homeowners to be involved
- The current convoluted structure
- That any new body should be open to all (as with working groups)
- The low satisfaction for homeowners

The Panel then considered the presentation, along with the three options set out by the Chair and made the following points:

- That separating tenants and homeowners is divisive and creates two groups and funding
- That for homeowners involvement is triggered by issues that relate directly to them as homeowners – major works and large service charges
- That ways of managing Adult and Children’s safeguarding included overlapping meeting with one group first, then a joint meeting of both groups and then the other group
- That the bulk of services provided by the council are tenure blind: customer services, repairs, major works, cleaning, ground maintenance, dealing with anti social behavior, grounds maintenance.
- To look at the opportunity to create a holistic approach and be more ambitious. To look at services that are, or should be, joined up whilst noting there are some exclusive issues that could be dealt with through tenure specific working groups.
- To be more inclusive and less divisive
- To note that there was cultural change involved and the pressure that the Homeowners Council had been put under to boycott the Panel
- That homeowners were stigmatised and previous experience of joined-up proposals looked like tenant representatives would simply dominate
- Agreement about the importance of cultural change and creating a different, non-adversarial, approach
- There was also discussion around the merits of election and whether this might cover skills and diversity
- That the need to have a leasehold specific group to look at homeowner related issues could be justified by the current low levels of satisfaction among leaseholders

The Panel then considered various options:

- That there be a strategic cross-tenure body with two support geared tenant and homeowner bodies
- That any of the options could work if people wanted them to
- That a strategic body plus a homeowner group to look at leasehold/freehold specific issues could be justified given the particular issues faced by homeowners
- That separate bodies with a joint cross tenure meeting
- That the current Tenant Council approach was not inclusive or receptive to change

There was no consensus around any one option. There was support for an element of a joined up approach for cross tenure and strategic issues, and support for an element of separate bodies for tenants and homeowners. Rather than divide the Panel by picking an option the Chair proposed, and the Panel agreed, that he prepare a further report for the final meeting setting out the options, in line with the support identified above, with pros and cons for these options.

The final meeting will also consider the final draft report.

## Meeting Seven Decision Table

1. That digital training be considered for TRAs and communities in the proposed Communities or Strategic Funds.
2. That TRAs and Community Groups should be supported to work with residents impacted by welfare reform and should be covered in training and funding considered for TRAs and Community Groups
3. The Panel acknowledged that there were other residents who are not General Needs (Temporary Accommodation, Sheltered and Extra Care Housing, Supported Hostels and Travellers) who should be part of future involvement approaches.
4. That the Council should support TRAs being set up where this is wanted by residents.
5. The agenda for the new Housing Forums should be resident driven with polls conducted of residents on topics for the meeting.
6. The inclusion of a question on future surveys about “does your landlord listen to you and act on your views?”
7. That the Code of Conduct is reviewed both to ensure it is robust and able to be implemented effectively to prevent inappropriate behaviour.

# Resident Involvement Review Panel Report

## Executive Summary

This Panel report sets out a new way forward for resident involvement in Southwark. If adopted and implemented it will allow every tenant and homeowner a range of opportunities to be involved at a local community level, at an area level and at a Boroughwide level, including different areas of interest and in different ways.

It will result in a fundamental restructure of the current structures for residents and staff alike and create the opportunity for involvement to result in improved services, informed policies and a different relationship between the Council and empowered residents.

## Recommendations

1. That the Council adopt the following vision:

*To create empowered communities and treat residents with respect, and as customers.*

2. That the Council adopt the following values:

*That the Council should develop a range of ways for residents to be involved*

*That the Council should be transparent, honest and show integrity when working with residents*

*That there should be accountability for all in positions of responsibility*

*That there should be mutual respect between the Council and residents*

*That the Council should empower residents and put people first*

*That involvement should reflect the diversity of the resident population and reach out to all residents*

*That the Council should ensure value for money and money spent treated as if it one's own*

*That the Council should collaborate with residents to find positive solutions*

*That the Council should communicate successfully with residents*

*That the impact of involvement should be measured and reported openly*

3. Capturing impact would be supported by inclusion of a question on future surveys about “does your landlord listen to you and act on your views?”
4. The Council should adopt an approach of ensuring that all properties are covered by at least one face-to-face involvement event each year. This already happens where TRAs exist but it should be expanded to estates where TRAs don't exist and to street properties. Where a TRA doesn't exist the Council should organise an annual meeting. This would ensure that all residents would be able to discuss their community and their services with the council each year whether a TRA exists in the estate or not. To support that approach the Panel agreed four principles for any such meeting:
  - That all Tenants and HomeOwners in the area/estate are invited to attend and take part
  - That notice of at least 7 days is given
  - That all attending meetings show good conduct to each other<sup>1</sup>
  - That all attending meetings respect equality and diversity

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<sup>1</sup> This extends to all meetings

5. The Council should make proposals for a “red button” approach whereby feedback received at these meetings is analysed alongside other sources of service qualitative feedback (such as official complaints) to identify systemic service issues and respond accordingly.
6. That the model constitution for TRAs should be revisited to reduce jargon and the bureaucracy involved for TRA officers through a co-design process.
7. That the Code of Conduct for all resident meetings is reviewed.
8. That the Council should continue to support TRAs being set up where this is wanted by residents.
9. That the current Area Housing Forums be replaced by 5 new Housing Forums, mirroring the housing management areas, with two each in the larger areas and one in the smallest. These Forums would be open to all council tenants and homeowners in their respective area. They would need a clearly defined role, have a standard agenda and should include housing service performance and could also be a place for ‘red button’ for systemic issues identified by residents to be escalated.
10. The agenda for the new Housing Forums should be resident driven with polls conducted of residents on topics for the meeting.
11. That the Council commit itself to engaging with tenants and leaseholders on the following strategic areas:
  - a. Value for Money
  - b. Major Works Planning
  - c. Consultation approaches
  - d. Communication
  - e. Performance (including satisfaction)
  - f. Resident scrutiny
  - g. Creating new and renewal of housing policies.
  - h. Regulatory compliance
12. That the Council set up a menu of involvement to cover the above strategic areas including:
  - a. Codesign processes
  - b. Fixed Groups
  - c. Task and Finish groups<sup>2</sup> (which might cover the consultation process and Major Works planning)
  - d. Conferences
  - e. Digital involvement (see below)
  - f. Resident inspectors
  - g. Reading Groups
  - h. Surveys
  - i. Discussion Groups
13. That the above be considered as a ‘ring of involvement’ supporting and informing strategic discussions between tenants, and homeowners, with the Council.
14. That the Council set out reasonable expectations for any strategic group for tenants or leaseholders. These should include:
  - a. That it should be accountable
  - b. It should be clear who was a member of the body
  - c. That it should represent homeowner/tenant views and concerns
  - d. It would receive input from homeowners/tenants
  - e. That there should be a code of conduct

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<sup>2</sup> A Task and Finish group is a group set up as a sub group of larger project group that specifically looks at one item that needs to be delivered... the 'Task'. Once that area of work has been completed, the group disbands... the 'Finish'... and the work is then assimilated back into the larger project group.

- f. Members should seek out views of peers
- g. Members should be elected
- h. To ensure robust governance there should be an annual review
- i. That time limits be set on membership

15. That there not be more than one strategic body for homeowners

16. That there should be a Communities Fund. This should include the following:

- a. It should be available to communities.
- b. There should be clear objectives and outcomes for the fund and accountability for delivering those outcomes.
- c. TRAs, TMOs, Resident Groups and community organisations (with clear support from the community) would be eligible to bid for funds.
- d. The Council should support applications from looser groups without a TRA or a bank account
- e. Set objectives for the fund
  - i. Estate cohesion and inclusion
  - ii. Community development
  - iii. Support for TRAs
  - iv. Digital training
  - v. Welfare Reform, including signposting
  - vi. Quality of life
  - vii. Impact
- f. There should be an open and thorough process for communicating this fund stating the purpose, how to apply, what requirements there were and the importance of impact from what the fund supported.
- g. There should be a group consisting of councillors, officers and residents that would decide applications based on a transparent process as well as the precise criteria to be used. This group would review impact annually and apply learning for future fund objectives and criteria.

17. That there should be a Boroughwide fund. This should include the following:

- a. There should be clear objectives and outcomes for the fund
- b. That those objectives include advice and support for tenants and homeowners
- c. That there is accountability for all receiving funding for delivery of objectives and outcomes
- d. That there are appropriate and applied mechanisms for dealing with conflicts of interest
- e. That there is efficient decision making with other parallel funding processes
- f. That there is a Group that sets the objectives, decides upon applications, review impact annually and apply learning for future fund objectives and criteria.

18. The Panel agreed three pilot projects for digital involvement covering:

- a. Major works
- b. Communication
- c. Sounding Board

The Council should draw up costs and plans, including co-production, to implement these.

19. The Panel acknowledged that there were other residents who are not General Needs (Temporary Accommodation, Sheltered and Extra Care Housing, Supported Hostels and Travellers) who should be part of future involvement approaches.

20. That the Council draw up an Action Plan to implement these recommendations and work with tenants and leaseholders to ensure they are introduced.

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## Background

The Council commissioned Kaizen/Social Engine in 2017 to carry out a review of the Resident Engagement structure. That review<sup>3</sup> set out a number of challenges for both the Council and the current resident engagement structure. That structure has been in place for over 30 years and increasingly strained in its ability to represent all tenants and homeowners, and find ways in which they can be engaged. There was a lack of awareness of the current structures and funds available and insufficient attention to impact of those structures and funds. There was also a lack of a Council-wide vision about the purpose of resident engagement.

The Council, in line with its manifesto commitment to “work with tenants, residents and homeowner groups to find new ways to engage so that more people can have their say”, agreed to set up a co-design panel of residents to review the housing engagement and involvement structure.

## Recruitment of Panel

The Council agreed that there be an independent Chair for the Panel. Following a procurement exercise I was appointed as Chair.

The Panel was composed of

- 1 representative from Homeowners Council
- 1 representative from the MySouthwark Homeowners Board<sup>4</sup>
- 1 (tenant) representative from the Youth Council
- 7 residents with little or no previous experience of formally participating in the involvement structure
- 1 Officer from the Communities Division
- 1 Officer from Resident Services
- 1 Officer from Organisational Transformation

The Tenants Council were invited to send a representative but decided to boycott the work of the Panel. Attendance is recorded at Annex 1.

For the seven resident places there was a recruitment exercise involving all TRAs and Area Housing Forums and over 5,000 tenants and homeowners. Over 90 applications were received and I reviewed all applications for their interest, availability and representativeness in terms of tenure, age, gender, ethnicity and where they lived in the Borough. Those not selected were invited to join a Sounding Board to review and comment on the Panels discussions and draft recommendations.

There was a resident majority on the Panel.

## Approach

At its first meeting the Panel considered the background to the Review and the Panels Objectives. Additions are shown in italics. These were agreed as followed:

- a) Panel meets to decide its order of business and methods of working (including review of Kaizen report)
- b) Panel discusses and develops a vision of how the involvement structure should look and work
- c) Panel considers *engaging with communities* including the role of TRAs and Area Housing Forums
- d) Panel considers *strategic engagement with tenants and Home Owners* and the role of Tenant Council, *MySouthwark Board* and Homeowner Council
- e) Panel considers use and management of Tenant and Homeowner funds
- f) Panel considers digital involvement<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=6124&Ver=4>

<sup>4</sup> Initially the representative had come from the MySouthwark Homeowners Agency. The Homeowners Council expressed concerns about this arrangement. The representative for later meetings was a member of the MySouthwark Homeowners Board.

<sup>5</sup> This was originally set out by the Council as *Panel considers management of TRA halls*. Following a meeting with the Tenants Council Cllr Cryan agreed that this not be considered by the Panel. Given TRA halls were not part of the

g) Panel reviews Chair's draft report and produces final report and recommendations

The Panel also agreed the Chair's role, a Code of Conduct and its approach going forward. For all meetings there were papers with links to reports, other landlords' websites and publications, combined with a Chair's briefing providing an overview of the meeting's discussions.

## **Transparency**

All papers for, and minutes of, the Panel's work have been published on-line. Views of residents, stakeholders and officers have been shared with the Panel.

## **Evidence**

To support the Panel's work there have been a series of briefings, case studies, links and summaries for each meeting. The Case Studies and links are a valuable resource going forward for engaged residents, staff and councillors.

## **Panel Review**

A review of the work of the Panel will be undertaken by Peter Walters on behalf of HQN. This will seek views of those involved in the process about how it went and lessons to be learned for the future. The tightness of the timetable was an issue, was loosened, and will feature in my feedback.

## **Meetings**

I'm grateful to the following for giving up their time to meet with me and share, openly, their views about the background, current situation and way forward:

Southwark TMO Committee  
Ledbury TRA officers  
Ina Negoita  
Liz Errington  
Barbara Walsh  
Hilary Dobson  
Fiona Buist  
Martin Kovats  
Eva Gomez  
Stephen Douglas  
Michael Storer  
John McCormack  
Mark Compton-James  
Cllr Cryan  
Cllr Pollak

and the Homeowners Council for inviting me to their Conference as an observer and to discuss the work of the Panel at their meeting.

## **Strategic Vision**

The Panel received a presentation on the Council's A Fairer Future by Michael Storer. It also considered criticism by Kaizen of a lack of overall vision for resident engagement and the potential for involvement shown by the 54% of residents interested in being involved in the Kaizen Report. The Panel considered two

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Kaizen Review this makes sense and it is likely that the Panel would have recommended a more thorough audit and review of the current arrangements for TRA halls rather than propose a way forward

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reports by Amicus Horizon and Family Mosaic into resident involvement, five case studies and feedback from the Tenant and Homeowner Involvement team.

Finally it considered vision and values from a range of (anonymised and mostly but not exclusively housing organisations).

The Panel then set out a vision, combining its interest in communities and services, backed up by a series of values.

Vision:

*To create empowered communities and treat residents with respect, and as customers.*

Values:

*That the Council should develop a range of ways for residents to be involved*

*That the Council should be transparent, honest and show integrity when working with residents*

*That there should be accountability for all in positions of responsibility*

*That there should be mutual respect between the Council and residents*

*That the Council should empower residents and put people first*

*That involvement should reflect the diversity of the resident population and reach out to all residents*

*That the Council should ensure value for money and money spent treated as if it one's own*

*That the Council should collaborate with residents to find positive solutions*

*That the Council should communicate successfully with residents*

*That the impact of involvement should be measured and reported openly*

The value around communication was reinforced for me by my attendance at the Homeowners Council Conference. The value around impact was reinforced for me through the discussion with the Southwark TMOs about power and involvement making a difference, and further by feedback from the Sounding Board. The value around diversity was reinforced for me by all my contacts in Southwark.

Feedback had been sought from the Sounding Board on vision and values and the Panel considered this. As the feedback was consistent with the vision and values as set out the Panel made no further changes.

## **Communities and TRAs**

The Panel were grateful for members of Ledbury TRA attending the Panel meeting and sharing their experiences of being involved. The Panel acknowledged the substantial work and achievements of the TRA and invited them to stay for the rest of the discussion.

The Panel thought that TRAs are very valuable and important, should continue to be supported including supporting TRAs being set up where this is wanted by residents. TRAs should welcome both tenants and homeowners equally, and be prepared to welcome street property residents into membership.

Whilst TRAs are valued the Council should adopt an approach of ensuring that all properties are covered by at least one face-to-face involvement event each year. This already happens where TRAs exist but it should be expanded to estates where TRAs don't exist and to street properties. Where a TRA doesn't exist the council should organise an annual estate based meeting. This would ensure that all residents would be

able to discuss their community and their services with the council each year whether a TRA exists in the estate or not. The meeting should work to a set agenda and include feedback.

To support that approach the Panel agreed four principles for any meeting:

- That all Tenants and HomeOwners in the area are invited to attend and take part
- That notice of at least 7 days is given
- That all attending meetings show good conduct to each other
- That all attending meetings respect equality and diversity

The Panel further considered the issue of behaviour, agreed that the principle of good behaviour should extend to all meetings and the Code of Conduct be reviewed to ensure it was robust in terms of setting expectations and ensuring these are enforced.

The Panel discussed and agreed a “red button” approach whereby feedback received at these meetings is analysed alongside other sources of service qualitative feedback (such as official complaints) to identify systemic service issues and respond accordingly.

The Panel also agreed that the model constitution for TRAs should be revisited to reduce jargon and the bureaucracy involved for officers. Following my discussion with the TMOs I propose that this should be through a co-design process with TRAs.

The Panel acknowledged that there were other residents who are not General Needs (Temporary Accommodation, Sheltered and Extra Care Housing, Supported Hostels and Travellers) who should be part of future involvement approaches.

## **Area Housing Forums**

The Panel then considered the future of Area Housing Forums. Given these were based around areas for housing management that no longer existed it was hard to see the rationale for the Forums continuing in their current form (and there should had been a discussion when the housing management areas were changed). The Panel was also concerned that the sheer scale of meetings people needed to attend to participate – 10 TRA meetings and 10 Area Housing Forums each year (and more if involved in one of the Councils) was both off-putting and unsustainable. The Panel did think that an ‘in-between’ structure would be useful but was sceptical about whether merging with Community Councils, as proposed by Kaizen, would give enough emphasis to housing matters. However the ‘open to all’ approach of Community Councils was welcomed.

The Panel thought there should be that there should be 5 new Housing Forums, mirroring the housing management areas, with two each in the bigger areas and one in the smallest. These Forums would be open to all council tenants and homeowners in their respective area. They would need a clearly defined role, have a standard agenda and should include housing service performance scrutiny function. They could also be a place for ‘red button’ for systemic issues identified by residents to be escalated.

The Panel considered further how the five new Housing Forums might work. They supported the idea that the agenda should be resident driven with polls conducted of residents on topics for the meeting. They also supported the opportunity for networking. A possible draft agenda might include:

- Key Performance Indicators
- Ad hoc polls for top two topics to be discussed
- Red Button issues
- Complaints summary
- You Said We Did feedback from previous meeting
- Networking opportunity
- ‘Sandpit’ session before the meeting to raise individual issues

The Panel noted that advocacy services might be needed to support residents who do not have English as a first language.

The Panel noted that if Local Housing Networks are held quarterly there will be 20 meetings per year compared to the current 96 Area Housing Forums each year. This releases a considerable level of resource to support the new involvement opportunities.

## Strategic Engagement

The Panel noted the current arrangements for strategic engagement, the criticisms of the Kaizen review of those arrangements and the outstanding need for regulatory compliance. The Panel then considered the following topics for engagement:

- The need to cover Value for Money
- The importance of Major Works Planning to Leaseholders, where project groups could be set up with local residents where the Council would welcome earlier engagement.
- The need for robust consultation approaches
- The currently low level of satisfaction with housing services, including in comparison with similar landlords and the importance of service standards
- The frustration shown at the Homeowners Conference about communication
- The need to ensure regulatory compliance and resident scrutiny
- The need to engage residents with producing effective and easily understood policies.

The Panel also discussed the issues with all of this being considered by one or two strategic groups alone. I raised the idea of a “Ring of Involvement” with a range of mechanisms for involvement supporting and informing a strategic structure. The idea that one or two strategic bodies could populate all these mechanisms was neither practical nor desirable.

The Panel considered a menu of involvement<sup>6</sup> including:

- Codesign processes
- Fixed Groups
- Task and Finish groups<sup>7</sup> (which might cover the consultation process and Major Works planning)
- Conferences
- Digital involvement including use of MySouthwark Account, emails and social media (to be discussed in meeting 6)
- Resident inspectors
- Reading Groups
- Surveys

The Panel then considered how a strategic structure might work.

Meeting 8

## Leaseholders

In my view the MySouthwark Homeowners Agency was created to provide a focus on improving services to Homeowners following some particularly poor satisfaction results. The MySouthwark Homeowners Board was created to provide homeowners input into the work of the Agency. At that time the Homeowners Council was not well placed to play the role envisaged and the Board was created. The subsequent uplift in

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<sup>6</sup> Proposed Value: *That the Council should develop a range of ways for residents to be involved.*

<sup>7</sup> A Task and Finish group is a group set up as a sub group of larger project group that specifically looks at one item that needs to be delivered... the 'Task'. Once that area of work has been completed, the group disbands... the 'Finish'... and the work is then assimilated back into the larger project group.

the governance in the Homeowners Council means that if the Agency was being set up today then it is debatable that the Board would be created. Thus we have a situation which is untenable to all involved who all agree that this needs resolving.

The Panel heard how the Homeowners Council was constituted of volunteers, had produced a strategy and held open meetings. There had been an uplift in how it operated and this was supported by the Council. There was an acknowledgement that the current structure had too many steps to gain election to the Homeowners Council which they were seeking to address.

The Panel felt that there should only be one strategic body for Homeowners, but within the wider involvement approach proposed and set out expectations for how it should operate:

- That it should be accountable
- It should be clear who was a member of the body
- That it should represent homeowner views and concerns
- It would receive input from homeowners
- That there should be a code of conduct
- Members should seek out views of peers
- Members should be elected
- To ensure robust governance there should be an annual review

The Panel was aware of the role of LAS2000 as a group independent of the Council and welcomed that role continuing.

## Tenants

Unlike leaseholders, where there was input and engagement from already people already engaged, there has been no input from the Tenants Council. Nonetheless the Panel felt that the principles set out for a strategic leaseholder body should also apply to any strategic tenant body, with the inclusion of time limits.

## Tenant and Leaseholder Funds

The Council pays for the current involvement structure by setting aside a portion of the rent collected by tenants (£13.78/year) and Home Owners (£10/year). These in turn provide income for the [Tenants Fund](#) (£620,000 budget) and [Home Owners Fund](#) (£190,000 budget). The Tenant Fund and Homeowner Fund have working groups (Tenant Fund Management Committee and Homeowner Fund Management Committee) that make recommendations on how the funds are allocated. There is also the Tenants & Residents Social Improvements Grants (TRSIG) £244,000 (budget) administered through a Grants Panel of 6 people elected by Area Housing Forums<sup>8</sup>.

There is also some cross-subsidy in place with 27% of the Homeowners Fund going to the Tenants Fund to cover TRAs and some funding also supporting training officers based in the Tenant and Homeowner team.

This is not a levy and the Funds are part of the Council's Housing Revenue Account. The Council chooses to delegate decision making to the 2 Councils and 1 Panel subject to an annual report and agreement by the Lead Member for Housing on the following years plans. The Kaizen Review is critical of the current arrangement as having an over-emphasis on outputs, internal controls and financial management rather than delivering outcomes and opportunities that benefit local communities. This criticism was supported by the weak outcomes for major recipients of funding including SGTO and the training posts<sup>9</sup>.

The Panel identified two separate approaches for future funding. Firstly there was a need for a community/TRA fund focused at a community level. Secondly there was a need for a Boroughwide fund for strategic issues.

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<sup>8</sup> This would have to change if the proposal to replace with five Neighbourhood Forums was adopted

<sup>9</sup> Please note this is not necessarily a criticism of their performance just that that performance is not clearly captured

For both funds the Panel thought any approach should be 'joined up' with other funds<sup>10</sup>, have a clear focus on outcomes, applicants should be accountable for delivery and manage conflicts of interest appropriately.

For the community/TRA fund the Panel identified the following objectives (which may not be exhaustive):

- Estate cohesion and inclusion
- Quality of Life
- Community development
- TRA support
- Support for digital training (Whilst noting the Council's own support for digital training through libraries)
- Welfare Reform, including signposting
- Impact

On Welfare Reform the Panel received a received a paper from David Eyles (HomeOwners Council & Rotherhithe Area Housing Forum) on disabled residents. It covered cuts in Government funding to the Council, benefit changes and the profound impact on residents affected. The paper pointed out the knock-on effect on TRAs and community groups and argued for information and support for those impacted by changes. The Smith Institute have recently published [Safe as Houses 2](#), detailing the increase in rent arrears for Southwark residents on Universal Credit. The Panel noted the importance of signposting in any training or guidance shared with TRAs and Community Groups and other sources of support.

The Panel identified the following as eligible to apply for funding:

- TRAs
- TMOs
- Resident Groups
- Community Organisations (with the support of communities)

The Council should support applications from looser groups without a TRA or a bank account through the Tenant and Homeowner Involvement Team. Groups receiving funding should be inclusive of tenure and wider diversity.

The Panel supported an open and thorough process for communicating this fund stating the purpose, how to apply, what the requirements were and the importance of impact from what the fund supported.

The Panel supported setting up a group consisting of councillors, officers and residents that would decide applications based on a transparent process as well as the precise criteria to be used. This group would review impact annually and apply learning for future fund objectives and criteria. The process should be simple to apply for, administer and decide upon.

Existing funding that could cover this includes:

- TRSIG £184,000
- TRA grants £228,000
- Small grants scheme for community events £30,000

For the Boroughwide Fund the Panel identified the importance of setting clear objectives and outcomes for the fund. The Panel supported a strong level of advice and support for both tenants and homeowners, delivered separately. Other objectives discussed included holding resident conferences.

The Panel supported accountability for all receiving funding for delivery of objectives and outcomes. It also supported that there are appropriate and applied mechanisms for dealing with conflicts of interest.

The Panel agreed there should be efficient decision making with other parallel funding processes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Subject to further information from the Council

That Panel agreed that there should be a Group that sets the objectives, decides upon applications, review impact annually and apply learning for future fund objectives and criteria.

## Digital Involvement

The Panel considered its own experiences, including on-line chat room and forums, and heard from Mark Compton-James, Head of IT and Digital Services, about the Council's approach. His experience of Forums was that they were expensive to run in terms of time, needed policing and a different set of skills to current staff. However he reassured the Panel that the technology was the easy bit and emphasised the importance of co-designing platforms with residents.

The Panel identified three approaches for digital involvement:

- Major Works, which would be locally based and a Panel priority for engagement
- Communication, which would be thematic and a Panel priority for engagement and
- Setting up a Sounding Board through emails which could widen considerably the number of involvement residents

## Sounding Board

The Vision and Values were shared with the Sounding Board<sup>12</sup>, who supported them. There was one point of challenge considered by the Panel on whether the value on working *on collaboration with residents* should be extended to cover other agencies that the Panel decided not to accept.

Part of the Panel's recommendations were shared with the Sounding Board<sup>13</sup>, who broadly supported them. There were three points of challenge concerning support for TRAs to be set up, (poor) behaviour shown at meetings and the failure to listen to tenant views, all of which the Panel considered and made additions to this report.

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<sup>11</sup> Subject to further information from the Council

<sup>12</sup> Only a few responses were received.

<sup>13</sup> Only a few responses were received.

## Discussion paper - Strategic Bodies

We paused this discussion at the end of the last meeting and I agreed to prepare this paper for our final meeting. In doing so the Panel are aware that we have consensus on approaches to local, area and the wider 'ring of involvement' surrounding any strategic body or bodies.

At the heart of this discussion is how the Panel see involvement – either as joined up with some separate areas for involvement based around tenure, or as based on tenure with some joined up areas. The Panel have made it clear that there needs to be coverage of a joined up approach for cross-tenure and strategic issues, and an element of separate bodies for tenants and homeowners. I've sought in the three options below to address both joined up and tenure specific issues and to get them closer to the point where any of them could be agreed and implemented.

### Option One

<b>Strategic Cross Tenure Body</b>				
<b>Coverage</b>	<b>Panel comments in favour</b>	<b>How single tenure issues might be addressed</b>	<b>Concerns</b>	<b>Advantages</b>
Customer Services Repairs Major Works Cleaning Ground Maintenance Dealing with Anti Social Behaviour  Strategic funding (including support and conferences) and community funding  Strategic plans  Body includes Lead Member and Directors	Separation is divisive and creates two groups and funding  Bulk of services provided are tenure blind  Creates a holistic approach  Importance of cultural change	By setting up either a specific group for each tenure, or working groups on tenure specific issues.	Homeowner issues might be overridden by the larger number of tenants  Not compatible with Homeowner Council proposals  Would be seen as abandoning the resident led current structures entirely	Simple clear structure  Coverage of cross tenure issues  Allows for coverage of tenure specific issues

## Option 2

<b>Two single tenure bodies with joint meetings to discuss cross tenure issues</b>				
<b>Coverage</b>	<b>Panel comments in favour</b>	<b>How strategic issues might be addressed</b>	<b>Concerns</b>	<b>Advantages</b>
<p>Homeowners</p> <p>Homeowner Fund Major Works Service Charges My Southwark Homeowners Agency Homeowner Conferences Homeowner Working Groups Homeowner KPIs Enforcement notices Lease management, Reports from advice service</p> <p>Tenants</p> <p>Rent Tenant Fund Tenant Working Groups Tenancy management, Reports from advice services Allocations</p>	<p>Homeowners involvement is triggered by issues that relate to them directly as homeowners</p> <p>Closer to Homeowner Council proposal for change</p>	<p>By having overlapping meetings of one group first, then a joint meeting, then the other group</p> <p>The joint meeting would consider cross-tenure issues</p>	<p>Might be time consuming and confusing with disputes over who leads on cross tenure issues</p> <p>May not represent cultural change</p> <p>Resistance to setting up a tenant group</p>	<p>Supports evolution of Homeowners Council</p> <p>Allows for cross tenure issues to be jointly discussed</p> <p>Allows for creation of a tenant body</p>

### Option 3

<b>Strategic Cross Tenure Body with a specific homeowner group</b>				
<b>Coverage</b>	<b>Panel comments in favour</b>	<b>How strategic and single tenure issues might be addressed</b>	<b>Concerns</b>	<b>Advantages</b>
<p><b>Strategic Group</b></p> <p>Customer Services Repairs Major Works Cleaning Ground Maintenance Dealing with Anti Social Behaviour</p> <p>Strategic funding (including support and conferences) and community funding</p> <p>Strategic plans</p> <p>Body includes Lead Member and Directors</p> <p><b>Homeowners Group</b></p> <p>Homeowner Fund Major Works Service Charges My Southwark Homeowners Agency Homeowner Conferences Homeowner Working Groups Homeowner KPIs Enforcement notices Lease management, Advice</p>	<p>The need to have a leaseholder specific group to look at homeowner issues could be justified by the current low levels of satisfaction amongst leaseholders</p>	<p>The Strategic Group would lead on cross-tenure issues</p> <p>The Homeowner Group would lead on homeowner issues</p> <p>Tenant specific issues would be covered by a working group or working groups</p>	<p>Tenants might feel left out</p> <p>Closer to the Homeowner Council proposal but some differences</p> <p>How would the Homeowner Group relate to the Strategic Group?</p>	<p>Allows for a strategic group on cross tenure issues</p> <p>Allows for evolution of the Homeowners Council</p> <p>Recognises the issues faced by homeowners</p> <p>That the 'list' of tenant tenure specific issues is comparatively short.</p>

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