

Appendix D

Housing Select Committee – resident engagement in housing development review

Notes from meeting with Jessica Leech, Community Engagement Manager, London Borough of Southwark

10th October 2019

Cllr Aisling Gallagher (Housing Select Committee) and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) were present. Some of the key points of the discussion are set out below:

- 1.1 In 2014 Southwark carried out a significant consultation and established a charter of principles on resident involvement in the development of new homes (in estates).
- 1.2 One of the key principles was that consultation on new sites would be led by local project groups of residents and local councillors in each area.
- 1.3 In 2015 Southwark asked residents to identify sites where new council homes could be built, using an online map and talking to TRAs.
- 1.4 It was a collaborative process – tenants recognised the need for new council homes.
- 1.5 In 2015 Southwark worked with people borough-wide to develop the design principles that should be adopted.
- 1.6 This identified, for example, a preference for separate kitchens and living rooms; the value placed upon green spaces on estates; and how the sense of space contributed to a sense of wellbeing and value of place.
- 1.7 Project group membership is drawn from a mixture of TRA representatives and people who express an interest at initial drop in sessions.
- 1.8 The wider engagement process involves discussions with ward Cllrs, TRAs, open drop-ins, project groups, meeting three or four times, with the first session including training with an independent advisor.
- 1.9 Those that are invited to open drop ins are anyone who lives in the vicinity of the potential site, taking into account natural boundaries such as railway lines and major roads, and ensuring that rows of houses or parts of estates, where development is proposed, are not excluded.
- 1.10 It is the council's view that through collaborative working it is able to design proposals that can be supported locally and bring benefit to the community within which they are located whilst delivering new council homes for local tenants and others in desperate need of a home they can afford to rent.
- 1.11 Southwark carried out an evaluation of four schemes, two that worked well and two where there were challenges, to find out how residents felt.
- 1.12 In some areas there was little take up of the offer to form project groups and the way residents were involved in the design process adapted to ensure that residents continued to be engaged.
- 1.13 Residents groups for one site expressed concern about involving residents that are not living on the estate affected and on another residents in private homes near a proposed development complained that they were not involved.
- 1.14 Some residents have requested repairs to existing properties first.
- 1.15 There have been sites that Southwark has not been able to move forward.

- 1.16 Southwark also carried out a Housing Commission in 2013 to assess the state of housing in Southwark, which, without an ALMO had not qualified for funding for decent homes.
- 1.17 This included community and stakeholder engagement on what should be the way forward for housing and establishing a Futures Steering Board of council tenant and homeowner representatives, with independent facilitation and the capacity to co-opt members.
- 1.18 The Futures Steering Board is very supportive of building council homes and has been a good forum to talk about the challenges and get insight on working with tenants. It is however quite resource intensive for key officers.
- 1.19 In 2017 Southwark made amendments to the charter and engagement process.
- 1.20 This included stating the importance of TRAs in the process and recognising that one size does not fit all and on some occasions the council may wish to modify the way in which it works.
- 1.21 Council officers will also now prepare engagement plans based on gathering local intelligence much earlier in the process where delivery is based on the council's estates.
- 1.22 The council will also endeavour to involve residents who may move into the new homes when they are completed.
- 1.23 There is another review planned of the council's wider engagement process.
- 1.24 There are plans to provide guidance and toolkits for staff, to run master classes and training for staff, and to involve people from the community and voluntary sector in the training.
- 1.25 Southwark has an engagement plan template, which asks a series of questions to guide the engagement process. This includes questions about purpose, stakeholders, and what residents need to contribute. TRAs are also consulted about draft engagement plans.
- 1.26 There can be a tension between good quality engagement and time, but each site is different. It is important to be aware of site history when planning engagement.
- 1.27 Southwark produced a template Terms of Reference for setting up project groups, which is flexible based on local intelligence.
- 1.28 There's a difference between letting people know something is happening and helping them to shape it.
- 1.29 Who should be involved in projects should be informed by sensible analysis of the geography of the estate.
- 1.30 There are different levels of engagement depending on the stake someone has in the development.
- 1.31 There are significant barriers to setting up TRAs in terms of resourcing support.
- 1.32 Southwark's new homes programme also includes infill development.
- 1.33 Southwark is also amending its statement of community involvement to include a development consultation charter setting out the consultation requirements for developers pre planning application. Requirements depend on the scale of the

development. The charter is then considered as part of the planning application process.

- 1.34 The statement of community involvement in a planning document with legal force.
- 1.35 It is important to be clear which stakeholders the council has a responsibility for, i.e. tenants, while recognising that leaseholders are as much part of local communities. The council has a relationship with everyone.