

Resident engagement in housing development

Housing Select Committee in-depth review

Draft recommendations

1. Summary

- 1.1. In June 2019 the Housing Select Committee agreed to carry out an in-depth review of resident engagement in housing development.
- 1.2. The aims of the review were to consider how Lewisham Council and its housing partners engage with communities around the process of regeneration and housing development; what has been learned from previous engagement activity; how so-called “hard-to-reach” groups and other local stakeholders, including TRAs, are engaged on housing development; and what could be learned from other local authorities.
- 1.3. Given that Lewisham Council is committed to delivering 1,000 new social homes by 2022 – a programme that will involve various levels of resident engagement – the committee agreed that it would be an appropriate time to review current practice in order to support the Council to achieve its strategic objectives.
- 1.4. The committee has considered a wide range of information during the course of the review through public engagement workshops, evidence sessions with subject experts, and meetings with other local authorities. The committee is extremely grateful for the evidence, guidance, support and time provided by everyone who has been involved in the review.
- 1.5. It is clear from the evidence provided that there are already a number of examples of good practice on resident engagement emerging in Lewisham – particularly recent initiatives to increase engagement with hard-to-reach groups. The committee has also been reassured by evidence from officers from the Council and Lewisham Homes that plans for future resident engagement are in line with best practice. The committee also notes that the Council has recently carried out its first resident ballot on estate regeneration and approved a Residents Charter in the last year.
- 1.6. The committee has nonetheless set out a number of comments and conclusions based on the evidence gathered during the review. Some are key principles – many of which, it is important to note, are either already in place or part of future plans – and some are recommendations for further action. The committee only expects responses to the specific recommendations.
- 1.7. While the committee is reassured that the Council and Lewisham Homes’ plans for resident engagement will be increasingly in line with best practice, the committee stresses the importance of these plans being monitored and evaluated to ensure that things are working as well as they can be – a point which is reflected in the recommendations.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The comments and recommendations set out below fall under the three key themes that emerged from the evidence for the review: early engagement; ongoing engagement; and hard-to-reach groups. A summary of all the evidence gathered is set out in the attached *Summary of evidence* report.
- 2.2. The recommendations are relevant to the engagement process for small and large developments, irrespective of the requirement to hold a resident ballot.
- 2.3. While the review’s recommendations are primarily aimed at the council in light of its commitment to building 1,000 council homes, the committee encourages *all* housing

developers to work with the council to ensure community involvement in development is as thorough as possible. The committee looks forward to the publication of Lewisham's *Statement of Community Involvement* following its review.

2.4. Early resident engagement

2.5. The importance of genuine, early engagement with residents was a key theme throughout the review – from guidance provided by the Mayor of London to feedback from public engagement exercises. The committee identified the following key principles and recommendations:

2.6. Key principles:

- Residents should be involved in the housing development process from the outset, as soon as development on a particular site becomes a realistic possibility.
- Early engagement should be focussed on genuinely listening to residents' priorities and concerns to develop a detailed understanding of the area, relevant site history and any local opposition.
- Engagement should start with a "blank piece of paper", before any specific design proposals, so that residents do not feel like they are being presented with a "done deal".
- Early engagement is an opportunity to be clear with residents, from the outset, about the purpose and drivers of a project and to prevent misinformation early on.

2.7. The committee recommends:

1. *Early resident engagement should include detailed stakeholder mapping and early engagement of local leaders, community groups and local service providers in order to identify local issues and opposition, hard-to-reach residents, and engagement preferences and opportunities.*
2. *"Place attachment" – residents' sense of local identity – should be analysed and taken into account on larger-scale and complex projects.*
3. *Early resident engagement should make the case for new homes as a social necessity and highlight the potential benefits to the local area.*

2.8. Active and ongoing engagement

2.9. The committee received evidence on engagement methods, the timing and location of engagement activity, geographic boundaries for involvement, TRA engagement, and comments on openness and transparency. The committee identified the following key principles and recommendations:

2.10. Key principles:

- Ongoing engagement should be focussed on addressing the local priorities, concerns and motivations identified through early engagement and highlighting potential benefits.
- It should be accessible to as wide a range of people as possible, aim to meet the engagement preferences of residents, and not normally involve onerous time commitment.
- In areas without existing resident groups consideration should be given to establishing residents' working groups for specific aspects of a project.
- The most affected residents should be engaged most intensively, and the roles of everyone involved should be made clear as early as possible. This includes the roles and responsibilities of the Council, Lewisham Homes, and other partners.

- Local Councillors and other local leaders should be regularly engaged throughout to tap into local opinion, communicate potential benefits, and broker compromise
- Resident involvement at the design stage can provide opportunities to tackle social and environmental issues identified during early engagement.
- The Council should set the standard for resident engagement on housing development.

2.11. The committee recommends:

4. *Plans for ongoing engagement and communications should be developed with the involvement of residents and stakeholders, and feature a variety of involvement structures, including at the design stage, based on residents' engagement preferences.*
5. *There should be different levels of engagement based on proximity to the development, taking into account local geography, with the role of residents and stakeholders in the process, and the key stages at which they can influence, made clear from the start.*
6. *"Town-hall seminars", bringing together councillors, officers, architects, and resident groups to explore issues around development should be considered for larger-scale and complex projects.*
7. *An engagement plan template should be developed for smaller and large-scale projects.*

2.12. **Hard-to-reach groups and capacity building**

2.13. The committee heard that engagement with hard-to-reach groups is one of the toughest challenges for resident engagement, particularly with those who might feel uncomfortable or intimidated attending typical public consultation meetings. The committee received evidence on a number of different approaches and methods.

2.14. Key principles:

- The early identification of hard-to-reach residents and their engagement preferences should be a key aim of early engagement.
- There should be engagement mechanisms and support in place to enable hard-to-reach residents to have their say, based on their engagement preferences.
- Residents should be given regular opportunities to feedback at on the engagement process.

2.15. The committee recommends:

8. *The Council and Lewisham Homes should work with other Council teams, external partners and organisations, and local residents, to proactively identify and reach out to hard-to-reach groups early on.*
9. *Engagement methods for hard-to-reach groups should include making targeted contact, specifically inviting attendance at engagement events, and community events tailored to the interests and activities of the relevant hard-to-reach groups.*
10. *Independent advisors should be considered for major regeneration projects.*
11. *Engagement activity should be monitored and data collected – particularly on engagement with young people and residents who have not been engaged with before.*
12. *Residents should be involved in evaluating engagement plans.*