

Housing Scrutiny Committee	Date: 11 July 2016	Ward(s): All
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SUBJECT: Service Review Group - Communications in the new build process

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 Communications in the new build process was identified by residents as a key area for review at the first Service Review Group (SRG) meeting in 2015. This report sets out the background to the review and the recommendations made by SRG members.
- 1.2 The review was resident-led and facilitated by the Principal Resident Participation Officer, Housing Development and Regeneration Manager and the Deputy Head of Strategy and Communications. The members of the Service Review Group who participated in this review were: Annabel Goulding, Nicola Eyidah, Dean Donaghey, Luigi Indri, Peter Owen and Helen Ladele. Review meetings were also attended by Jim Rooke, observer and representative of Housing Scrutiny Committee
- 1.3 The purpose of the review was to look at how the council (the New Build and Communications Teams) communicates with tenants and leaseholders when building new homes on council estates with the aim of improving processes and identifying areas of good practice.
- 1.4 The review has not looked at the role of the Planning Department and planning permissions or the work carried out by contractors.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the recommendations of the Service Review Group be received.

3. Recommendations from the Service Review Group (Set out in detail at Appendix 1)

- 3.1 Obtain feedback and publicise learning achieved so that residents are confident that learning is being used to improve how future projects are managed.
- 3.2 Be clear in all forms of communications to improve resident understanding of the new build process.
- 3.3 Involve the Inclusive Design Team, so that accessibility is at the heart of a new development and publicise this.

- 3.4 Improve the Customer Care experience.
- 3.5 Advise non-resident leaseholders of the scope of the work so they are aware how it may impact on the property they own and any sub-tenants.
- 3.6 Develop a role for a resident's champion.
- 3.7 Promote joint-working.

An action plan is being developed based on the recommendations and is set out at Appendix 2.

4. Background

- 4.1 The SRG first met with officers on 22 October 2015 to scope out the review, and identify the activities that would be undertaken by members of the SRG and officers. Appendix 3 sets out the programme of activities. At the first meeting, the following timetable was agreed:

Agreed task	Task completed
Scope the review	22.10.15
Gather the evidence	October 2015 to February 2016
Evaluate the evidence	4.2.16
Agree recommendations	25.2.16
Present recommendations to panel of officers	13.4.16
Report to Housing Scrutiny	11.7.16

4.2 Evidence gathering

- 4.2.1 A desktop review was carried out and included the following activities:

- Reviewing relevant policies and procedures;
- Reviewing the Local Lettings Policy;
- Reviewing complaints about the Local Lettings Policy;
- Assessing the quality of communications material from Architects, the council, contractors and the council's website;
- A benchmarking exercise looking at websites of other organisations.

- 4.2.2 To test the desktop research, members of the SRG:

- Visited the Parkhurst Road new build scheme;
- Spoke to the Capital Projects Manager from the New Build Team, Communications and Engagement Manager, an Architect, an Inclusive Design Officer and the Housing Mobility Manager;
- Met with a group of residents who were in the process of undergoing a new build programme on their estate;
- Attended two consultation events;
- Spoke to an officer from Camden Council to get information on how another council manages the new build process;
- Carried out a telephone survey of residents who had moved into new homes in the previous 12 months;
- Met with members of the Disability Housing Panel.

- 4.2.3 The evidence gathered from various activities is set out at Appendix 3.

5. Summary of findings

5.1 On examining the evidence and conducting interviews, SRG members found a number of examples where the service provided for residents worked really well and wanted to highlight some of the good practice within the three teams involved in the process; namely the New Build, Communications and Lettings Teams. The good practice identified was:

5.2 New Build Team

- The team use a site finder that will look at a variety of spaces and narrow them to possible options;
- The team carry out a feasibility study by looking at site suitability, considering architects' views and technical surveys. They also assess financial viability and any concerns raised by the area offices;
- Resident consultation using a variety of communications mediums.

Communications Team

- Act as a critical friend;
- Make sure leaflets and flyers are in plain English;
- Present any visual documents and boards;
- Make sure materials are accessible.

Lettings team

- Learn from each new scheme;
- Now attend the first meeting with residents to talk about the local lettings policy; advising residents how to get on the waiting list and how to use the bidding process.

5.3 SRG members also highlighted where improvements could be made

- Members of the SRG carried out a variety of tasks highlighted above and they have based their suggested improvements through their finding after speaking to residents and staff, attending consultation meetings, looking at survey results, speaking to members of the Disability Housing Panel and benchmarking;
- The table below shows SRG's findings and suggested improvements:

SRG findings based on tasks carried out by the group	Suggested improvements
<p>Staff meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We should consider producing a newsletter about the scheme at the end of the project • Communication materials should say what lessons have been learnt and what changes will be made to improve resident experience. 	<p>Publicise learning achieved so that residents are confident that learning is being used to improve how future projects are managed.</p>
<p>Website and communications review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications material should include the views of people who have experience of completed schemes, using photos and videos from inside their new homes; • Photographs of internal lay outs on completed schemes should be put on the council's website. <p>Staff Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer generated images (CGIs) of internal layouts should be used at the planning stage and include a person to help demonstrate the scale; 	<p>Consider different communication methods to improve customer experience.</p> <p>A review of the new build pages is already underway with the Communications team – this will include uploading the video about the Vaudeville Court scheme.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to understand flat pictures. 3D images would be better and it would be useful to include a person to help demonstrate the scale. These should be accessible to everyone; imagery should show a person in a wheelchair in adapted properties. • Produce a video of different stages of the development process including resident consultations using officers and residents. <p>Consultation meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The storyboards at the consultation events could be more organised so that residents can gain an understanding of the works to take place; • Information leaflets should be shorter and visually appealing. 	
<p>Staff meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Build Team should consult the Inclusive Design team before pre application stage; • The Inclusive Design team to discuss new design standards with Disability Action in Islington. 	<p>Involve the Inclusive Design Team so that accessibility is at the heart of a new development and publicise their involvement</p>
<p>Consultation meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There seemed to be a lot of anxiety and confusion at the start of the meeting. More information needs to be sent in advance to prepare residents for the drop-in consultation so they can prepare for it. <p>Focus Group meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer care training may be needed. The tone of letters needs to be more professional and empathic; • Consider how the role of the Resident Liaison Officer can be more effective in building trust, dealing with issues that arise and managing the expectations of residents. <p>Telephone Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider more face to face contact with residents as a telephone survey may not be as effective as discussing issues directly; • Over a 3 year project the council should have knocked on all residents' doors and had more face to face contact. 	<p>Improve the Customer Care experience</p>
<p>Staff meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lettings Team do not carry out satisfaction surveys at the moment but they are going to start doing this; • Communication materials should say what lessons have been learnt and what changes will be made to improve resident experience. <p>Telephone Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for a simple explanation of the local lettings policy and timelines for bidding. 	<p>Be open and transparent throughout the whole new build process so residents are aware of the potential impacts the new build scheme will have on the area they live in.</p>
<p>Focus group meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project managers should have better customer care, interpersonal and communications skills training; • Communication needs to be clear and simple with no jargon. <p>Consultation meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The booklet for Parkview Homes was too lengthy and could have been more visually appealing. Use of too many words and not 	<p>Be clear in all forms of communications to improve resident understanding of the new build process.</p>

<p>enough illustration. The information was too technical in nature; use of layman's terms would make it easier for residents to understand;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be less text on invites to events and better use of bullet points. <p>Communication materials review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be better co-ordination of the communications material between the council's Communications Team and the Contractor. 	
<p>Focus Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A non- resident leaseholder who attended the focus group meeting advised that he had received no direct communications from the New Build Team or Home Ownership Team about the proposed works on the Kings Square estate. 	<p>Advise non-resident leaseholders of the scope of the work so they are aware of how it may impact on the property they own and any sub-tenants.</p>
<p>Focus Group meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were concerns expressed that on estates where there is no a tenants' and residents' association (TRA) there is a need for an independent resident champion. <p>Telephone Survey with Vaudeville Court residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tenant stated 'I do feel that it is not fair that the Council should rely on one person to give out all the messages. If there a new tenant the TRA rep may not know and so this person would miss out on critical information.' 	<p>Develop a role for a residents' champion.</p>
<p>Benchmarking – Camden Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work more closely with other developing councils on best practice for engagement during new build schemes; • Consider joint procurement. <p>Communication materials review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Communications Team should provide the necessary templates and guidance for contractors so that the messages and material to residents is consistent and accurate. <p>Staff meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Build Team should consult the Inclusive Design Officers as early as possible in scheme development (even before pre App stage). 	<p>Promote joint-working between all teams involved in the new build process.</p>

5.4 A summary of findings are set out at Appendix 4.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial Implications

No direct financial implications arise as a result of the recommendations.

6.2 Legal Implications

No direct legal implications arise as a result of the recommendations.

6.3 Environmental Implications

No direct environmental implications arise as a result of the recommendations.

6.4 Resident Impact Assessment

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment has not been completed as the Service Review Group is a resident-led body which is making recommendations to the council. The recommendations made are intended to improve the communications with residents in the new build process. Services would need to consider any resident impacts arising from implementing the recommendations.

7. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 7.1 The recommendations reflect the key issues and areas for improvement identified by the SRG during the review. The recommendations identify that while there are good areas of practice with communication in the new build process, there are areas where some changes will allow for a better resident experience.
- 7.2 The recommendations have been developed into an action plan for consideration and agreement.

Signed by:



Director of Housing and Adult Social Services

Date 28 June 2016

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Detailed recommendations
- Appendix 2 - Action Plan
- Appendix 3 - Programme of activities carried out by the SRG
- Appendix 4 - Summary of findings

Background papers:

- None.

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