



Decision Maker:	Councillor Daniel Astaire – Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development
Date:	17 October 2016
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Resident Engagement on Housing Issues (Westminster Residents Panel)
Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	The report outlines funding implications for the Westminster Residents Panel
Report of:	Executive Director of Growth Planning and Housing Director of Housing and Regeneration

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Westminster Residents Panel (WRP) is an independent panel of mainly social housing residents. The Council invests £18k per annum to support the Panel and this includes a part time administrator and free office space. The Panel exists in addition to the resident engagement structures of each social landlord in Westminster including CityWest Homes which scrutinise the performance of each landlord.
- 1.2 An internal review of the Panel has concluded, that although it has many strengths, the Council’s objectives towards resident engagement on housing issues can be met in a better and more cost effective way, than through supporting a Panel of this kind. It is recommended that funding for the Panel is withdrawn, but as an alternative one to two annual meetings are held with social housing residents to discuss a range of housing issues. These will be attended

by senior officers and elected members. The meetings can be with WRP if they continue to operate independently but will be held anyway if they do not.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That funding and support for Westminster Resident's Panel in its current configuration is withdrawn but the Council offers them free meeting rooms if they wish to continue to operate.
- 2.2 That the Council continues to engage with the Westminster Residents Panel if they continue to operate and continue to have a sizeable membership, through one to two annual meetings, which will be attended by senior officers and elected members as appropriate.
- 2.3 That should Westminster Residents Panel no longer continue to operate, then one to two annual meetings are pro-actively organised and invitations extended to social housing residents within the City and these will be attended by senior officers and elected members as appropriate.
- 2.4 That the purpose of these meetings referred to in 2.2 and 2.3 above is to engage with a wide pool of social housing residents across Westminster and hear their views on a range of cross tenure housing issues including strategic issues. The overall aim of the meetings is for residents to feed into the development of housing and related strategies, it is not to scrutinise the performance of individual social landlords.
- 2.5 That the success of these meetings referred to in 2.2 and 2.3 are reviewed periodically and that the Director of Housing and Regeneration has the delegated authority to make any necessary changes to them.

3. Reasons for Decision

- 3.1 That rather than supporting an independent panel, the Council could meet its objectives of engaging with social housing residents, as set out in the Housing Strategy Direction of Travel Statement 2015, in a similar and more cost effective way.

4. Background, including Policy Context

- 4.1 Westminster Resident's Panel (WRP) was set up in 2011. They are an independent City wide forum of mainly council and registered provider residents and have a wide membership. They were established to support resident associations and to discuss best practice and issues of common concern. The Panel receives £18k in funding annually from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which includes support for a part time administrator. They are also provided with office and meeting space.

- 4.2 The Panel exists in addition to the resident engagement structures of individual social landlords across Westminster which are a statutory and regulatory requirement.
- 4.3 As set out in the Cabinet Report "*Review of the Westminster residents' engagement structure and proposals to change how statutory s105 housing consultation is carried out; July 2011*" it was intended that WRPs funding would be regularly reviewed. An internal review of WRPs role has been carried out in this context and in response to a number of factors including:
- Communications from WRP about their future role.
 - A new resident engagement structure at CityWest Homes and the establishment of Open Forum which introduced a new engagement approach by the Council with residents generally.
 - The changing national housing policy context which includes a requirement for councils to reduce social rents by 1% per annum for four years which requires the Council to ensure it is getting value for money from all expenditure from the HRA.
 - A new Housing Strategy Direction of Travel Statement 2015 for the Council which includes objectives to engage with more people from different tenures on housing issues, and to improve services, and to have a more common approach with registered providers towards tackling anti social behaviour.
- 4.4 The review considered the option of a new role for WRP linked, amongst other things, to delivering objectives in the Housing Strategy Direction of Travel Statement. It however concluded that rather than supporting an independent Panel, these objectives could be best, and more cost effectively, met through the Council supporting one to two annual meetings with council and registered provider residents to discuss and respond to a range of housing issues including strategic issues and those of common concern. These meetings will not focus on the individual scrutiny and performance of individual landlords which occur through other structures.
- 4.5 These annual meetings can be linked to WRP if they continue independently and have a wide membership or held separately if they do not.
- 4.6 Some engagement with private tenants may also be taken forward through Open Forum.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 WRP currently receives £18k in funding from the HRA annually. The one to two annual meetings will be funded from within existing resources so the recommendation represents a saving for the HRA.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There is no statutory requirement to have a cross tenure Panel of this nature. Under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 the Council has a legal obligation to make such arrangements as it considers appropriate to enable its secure tenants who are likely to be substantially affected by a matter of housing management, such as changes in the practice or policy, or service change, to be consulted. The current Resident Council and Area Panels fulfil this statutory duty.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 The review was carried out in consultation with WRP and the Deputy Cabinet Member responsible for Housing. Officers and the Deputy Cabinet Member attended a number of meetings with WRP and with their chair. WRP does not however agree with the findings of the review and support the retention of the Panel with the existing configuration of resources.

8. Staffing Implications

- 8.1 The recommendations will lead to a part time member of staff who works for Westminster Residents Panel being made redundant. The member of staff has their employment and contract administered by CityWest Homes though they report to Westminster Residents Panel. They have received full consultation on the threat of redundancy, and been given the opportunity to apply for jobs within CityWest Homes and received information on their potential redundancy payment.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Cecily Herdman, Principal Policy Officer.
Email: cherdman@westminster.gov.uk; Tel: 020 7641 2789

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet Member Report: Review of the Westminster residents' engagement structure and proposals to change how statutory s105 housing consultation is carried out (September 2011)

Cabinet Member Report: Review of the Council's residents' engagement structure and proposals to change how housing consultation under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 will be carried out (January 2016)

For completion by the **Cabinet Member** for Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development

Declaration of Interest

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

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: **Councillor Daniel Astaire, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development**

State nature of interest if any

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(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 recommendations in the report entitled **Resident Engagement on Housing issues (Westminster Residents Panel)** and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed

Councillor Daniel Astaire, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development

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:

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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 Director of Law, the City Treasurer and, if there are resources implications, the Director of People Services (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.

Appendix A

Other Implications

1. Resources Implications

- 1.1 The recommendation will result in a saving of £18k for the HRA as the one to two annual engagement meeting with residents will be carried out within existing resources.

2. Business Plan Implications

- 2.1 There are no Business Plan Implications.

3. Risk Management Implications

- 3.1 There are no Risk Management Implications.

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

- 4.1 There are no Health and Wellbeing Implications.

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 5.1 There are no Crime and Disorder Implications.

6. Impact on the Environment

- 6.1 There are no Environmental Implications.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 Initial Equalities Impact Screening has been carried out and a full Equalities Impact Assessment is not considered necessary. While the initial screening has identified that some of the residents that are represented by the Panel (social housing tenants) are more likely to have protected characteristics under equalities legislation compared with the overall Westminster population, the proposal does not reduce their opportunities for engagement with the Council.

8. Human Rights Implications

- 8.1 There are no human rights implications.

9. Energy Measure Implications

- 9.1 There are no Energy Measure Implications.

10. Communications Implications

- 10.1 WRP will be informed of the decision and officers will work with them to consider their future.
- 10.2 The one to two annual meetings which are proposed will either be communicated through WRP, or in conjunction with the Housing Association Chief Executive group, which is the liaison group between the Council and registered providers operating in Westminster.