

## **Residents' Commission on Council Housing**

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# **A Message from Residents on the Residents' Commission on Council Housing**

Tuesday 27 October 2015

As residents who have been involved in this unique Residents' Commission over the past six months, we've had time to reflect on that process. We are making this personal submission to provide insight into the life of the Commission and as a token of our confidence in the conclusions we've drawn.

The creation of a Residents' Commission demonstrated from the outset a commitment to residents being at the heart of decision making about the future of council housing in this borough. The well-conceived selection process brought together a richly diverse group of tenants and leaseholders with a broad range of experience and personal attributes. We greatly valued the chance to work together on behalf of all residents of council housing in the borough.

The Commission's work was a truly transparent process within which we were able to discuss a multitude of issues, always feeling that our input was valued by our colleagues. As resident members we were treated as valid representatives of the best interests, both now and in the future, of 17,000 households relying on our good judgement. We were well served by the experts who worked with us, both as independent members of the commission and as advisers. They showed great respect for our expertise as individuals and as residents, whilst at the same time translating their knowledge for us in a highly informative and helpful way.

Right from the beginning we were scrupulous in exploring evidence at a deep level. We questioned Council staff and independent legal, financial and housing experts until we were fully able to make informed, well evidenced decisions. Freedom of choice is important but freedom of choice supported by knowledge is more powerful still.

It helped that from the outset we had clear goals and strong governance of our work. We were fortunate in having a Chair who expertly kept us on task whilst at the same time recognising the need for thorough discussion and revisiting of issues. His own dedication to resident involvement was amply demonstrated by his many visits to meet residents in all parts of the borough.

The impartial and insightful advice of the Independent Tenants' and Leaseholders' Adviser (from TPAS) was invaluable to us throughout the process and we are also indebted to the Programme Team, who worked tirelessly to facilitate the work of the Commission.

In our deliberations we have looked at our borough in detail in a way that nobody ever has before – geographically, demographically and democratically. We have studied housing law and housing finance and recognised the absolute necessity of our recommendations being both legally and financially viable.

Having public hearings allowed us to ask pertinent questions in the full gaze of other tenants and leaseholders in the borough. This was important as it ensured that residents were fully aware of the level of questioning we undertook to reach our conclusions for this report.

In the hearings we were able to examine closely the complexities of the issues around housing by having in-depth discussions with expert witnesses. These were not only housing experts from other boroughs but residents from Hammersmith & Fulham, who provided us with a thorough overview of their experiences of housing services and told us how they thought these services could be improved. Council officers also gave us the benefit of their experience and honest views on the challenges they currently face.

Visiting many other housing providers in London and speaking to them about how they have shaped housing services in their boroughs was a vital part of our enquiry. We were able to explore some of their challenges and triumphs and widen our perspective to consider how these could contribute to our vision for the future of Hammersmith & Fulham.

It has genuinely been a privilege to be a part of such a unique process and to work alongside people equally passionate about the future of the borough who, but for the Commission, we may never have been lucky enough to meet. It has been an affirming experience, demonstrating just how much can be achieved through mutual trust and commitment. It gives us confidence about the future of resident involvement in this borough.

Has it been challenging? Yes, of course. Has it been difficult? Yes, sometimes. We've had to learn a great deal in a short space of time and manage our commitment alongside busy personal and professional lives. But somehow it hasn't been a chore at all going to so many meetings and having to read so many documents because the whole process has been fascinating and so worthwhile.

Because of the depth of our conversations, both within the public gaze and outside of it in closed meetings, we can wholeheartedly say that every member of the Commission thoroughly endorses the recommendations that we've made.

We believe our recommendation for transfer of Hammersmith and Fulham's stock of council homes to a new not-for-profit housing association meets a number of essential objectives. It is the only way to legally protect our homes for the future; it will enable essential maintenance and improvements of existing homes; it will open up innovative opportunities to invest in new homes and wider community development; it will create greater & meaningful resident involvement by giving residents a say in the governance & management of their housing provider.

We consider this to be a solution that will protect and improve our housing stock for current occupants and future generations. It has arisen from an extremely thorough and honest process in which we are proud to have taken part.

Finally, we wish to conclude by asking the local Councillors of Hammersmith and Fulham and the Department for Communities and Local Government to support our aspirations for a transfer of the housing stock. We firmly believe that this is the best solution for residents, and will ensure that their interests are at the heart of any future decisions regarding their homes.

Yours sincerely



*Andy Robson*



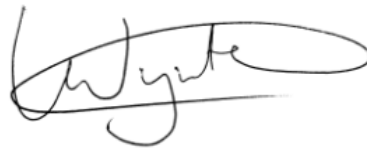
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