

## London Assembly Housing Committee – 27 February 2018

### Transcript of Item 5 – Strategic Issues for Social Housing in London

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Can I welcome our guests? We have from this side Andy Bates who is the JMB Manager for Leathermarket JMB. Can you tell us what JMB stands for?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It is Joint Management Board. We are a tenant management organisation (TMO).

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Great, thank you. We have Chyrel Brown who is the Director of Resident Services at Hyde Group, which is a housing association. We have Pat Hayes who is the Managing Director of Be First which, as I understand it, is Barking and Dagenham's regeneration company.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First):** Regeneration development company, yes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you. We have Su Gomer who is from Lambeth County Council where she is the Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management and Strategic Programmes, and therefore knows quite a lot about resident involvement.

What we are discussing are issues after the Grenfell Tower disaster. This must have been – it was for everybody in London – for social housing providers a profound shock. Certainly, in my own Council, in Camden, the Leader has literally said the words, "Grenfell changes everything". That is what we want to discuss today. We will start with some practical issues. I want to know a bit more from each of you what the main practical and strategic issues are that have emerged, including the financial impact of having to look at fire safety again?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** First of all, in Lambeth we have 122 high-rise blocks, blocks over 18 metres, 27 of which are cladded. Lambeth Council has an aged stock and that is the information we have on our stock database relating to our blocks.

One of the main practical points for us was that as a Council, as with all housing providers and owners, we already had obligations under the Regulatory Reform Order for carrying out fire risk assessments (FRAs) in relation to all our blocks. We have 2,800 FRAs that are called FRA1, the general FRA. There are already a lot of ongoing actions that one has to take.

The practical point for us post-Grenfell was in identifying those cladded blocks and which of them had blocks of an aluminium composite material (ACM) nature. We took the decision to send samples of all of our 27 blocks to the Building Research Establishment (BRE). Part of that was to gain resident reassurance, so residents saw we were actually giving all of our data over to an independent testing station. One of those came back as of an ACM nature. On that block the cladding was put up 25 years ago. What we, as a Council, did was first of all there was the issue about engaging with residents, especially those residents in that particular block and residents who were living in medium and high rise. There was a lot of information that was going out and meetings with residents set up. Quite naturally they had reassurance concerns. They had seen the concerns that were coming out from the residents of Grenfell and naturally had concerns for themselves.

Reassurance for us was a prime issue. We took the cladding, certainly the internal cladding, down the weekend it was found. By August we had all of the cladding removed. The issue for ourselves then, as with most providers, was what to replace it with. You only have to read the press to see the confusion there was about the different forms of cladding and insulation you should put up. The other point was that we were well aware that whilst we, and others, were looking at replacing cladding the market was going up in terms of pricing. What we were able to do was to use our current procured contractors, whom we have under a framework, to replace that cladding, using the information that came down from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and avidly reading the testing results. We are completing the replacement of that cladding by March [2018]. By doing that we were able to manage and minimise the costs. The Council has not made a decision yet about charging leaseholders for that work. We know what the legal advice would be but we need to relook at that and engage with our residents and our leaseholders.

There are a lot of practical things for us. The other practical point for us is with our other cladding that is not of ACM. We have panel systems and systems that were of the type of Ronan Point construction. We had already had previous surveys carried out and we had taken the gas out of that. Again, it is of a reassurance nature for residents.

One of the points for ourselves is that we have also engaged in [Dame] Judith Hackitt's [Chair, EEF] *Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: interim report*. Like most constructors we want to be clear about what the building regulations will say. We know the interim review says they are not fit for purpose, and that it is not just the building regulations but is across the whole suite of health and safety regulation. Whilst we are doing that the message that goes out to our residents is that the building regulations are not fit for purpose. We have taken some more proactive stands. We know what the guidance from the interim review of the building regulations says about looking at health and safety from the start to finish of a building, from when you are developing it to when you are maintaining it, making sure that any work that is done, whether construction or day-to-day repairs, are rechecking what the profile of that building is so you do not impact on fire safety in any works you are doing.

In terms of the financial implications for us, this financial year we have spent an additional £5.2 million on fire safety works. There will be the ongoing works you would also do and also the additional works. As this was happening the Fire Brigade - who we have good relations with and we are really pleased we are engaging well - served Fire Enforcement Notices on the block that did have the cladding and another block that was undergoing construction works. This is where we have other providers coming in, such as Cadent, from British Gas, which was looking what it was doing in terms of how it was routing materials in blocks. The Fire Brigade was not happy with some of the work it was doing, although it met building regulations.

The strategic need for ourselves is that we would like - I think everybody would like this - clarity on the building regulations when the final Building Regulations Review comes because we are maintaining not just the 122 high rises but we also have 31,000 homes in Lambeth, roughly 9,000 of which are leaseholders. It is clarity on the building regulations and constructions. We have heightened our risk tolerance in relation to all construction works, which includes our major works construction. We are just completing a £500 million programme of improvement works to Lambeth Council's housing stock. We have heightened the risk in terms of all contractors. We have used things like the Fire Brigade toolkit to relook at that risk, making very clear to all of our contractors that it is not just getting the job done but is making sure you are safeguarding the integrity of the building.

We have made an application to the Secretary of State for financial support in relation to the works we have carried out. We are engaging with the Ministry's finance team in relation to that.

Regarding reassurance for residents and resident engagement, we have also carried out not just the normal FRA you are required to do under what we call FRA1, which are communal, but more enhanced FRAs which are called FRA3/4s. It is like destructive work, so you are not just looking at the communals but looking at the structure, the voids, and you are hacking in and looking at all sorts of elements of the structure itself.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Have you done those on all of the blocks you mentioned?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We have prioritised our 27 blocks with cladding. We intend to publish those by the end of March [2018] so our residents can look at all of those. In the meantime, with all of the residents in those 27 blocks we have been engaging with the relevant Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs), one of them is a Tenant Management Organisation, so we can share what is coming out of those FRAs and the reassurance in the work we have done.

We are currently carrying out a feasibility study which will consider the technical need for sprinklers with a priority on the medium to high rise cladded blocks and what we call 'complex blocks', according to the building regulations those would be sheltered accommodation and hostels. We do have some in our sheltered accommodation and hostels but we are looking at the technical feasibility of that. We should have that by the end of March [2018].

We are sharing a lot with residents and taking them through that especially, as I said, medium and high-rise residents. There were liaisons, letters and things that went out generally to residents to say what was happening, which block was found with ACM and which were not. The Council has an engagement structure with its residents which is--

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We will have questions about that later on, if that is OK. You are being very comprehensive, which is good. You said you spent £5.2 million and you have asked the Government for reimbursement on that. When did you ask the Government and when do you think you will get an answer?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** The primary letters went out to the Government towards the autumn of last year [2017]. The Ministry reminded us that there is a certain *pro forma* process you need to undertake. We do have monthly meetings with London Councils and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are there each month. They were quite helpful in say about the *pro formas* we need to fill in. We are waiting for the outcome of that.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** I know Councils are going through their budget processes at the moment. It leaves a lot of uncertainty when there is no answer back yet from the Government. We will see how that goes.

In terms of transparency, you said you have been doing enhanced FRAs. Have you published any of your previous FRAs? I know there was guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) that came through on that.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** No, what the Council has done is if any residents say, "I would like to see the FRA for my block" then we will send that on request.

The issue for us is if we publish the 2,800 FRAs straightaway how our FRA team could respond in giving the guidance and information that was needed. In terms of prioritising our approach we started with publicising the more enhanced FRA3/4s and then we will move to look at whether we then publish the general 2,800 FRA1s.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** The guidance from the ICO was quite clear and it also said, “Do not wait to be asked”.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** In terms of risk management we are publishing those that have the highest risk at the moment, which are in relation to our medium and high-rise blocks. As I said, we are working with residents before those are published. We want to do that first so we can see how we are handling it and the questions that are coming up before the Council then looks at whether we publish the 2,800 FRAs.

**Tom Copley AM:** I know Lambeth has a house-building programme. If you are not compensated, is the money you have to spend on this going to have a knock-on effect on your house-building programme.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** At the moment, we are resourcing this from our housing revenue account and capital borrowing. As I mentioned, we have a substantial programme of upgrading our current stock. That is a £500 million programme. We have re-procured both our responsive contractors and our major works contractors and have made efficiency savings from that. At the moment we are managing our additional spend through a combination of efficiency savings, from the re-procurement, and through our major works programme.

**Tom Copley AM:** When you talked about the building regulations not being up to scratch, given the building regulations are set nationally and are the responsibility of the Government would you therefore say it ought to be the Government that is compensating Councils, given that it is the Government that set these standards and allowed this cladding to be used in the first place?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We have to be careful; we are non-political officers. We would not respond to the issue about the Government compensating or not compensating. The Government has given us an avenue to claim for finance and that is what we are doing.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** OK, thank you. Shall we move on to Pat Hayes from Be First? Can you give us an overview - maybe not in such detail because we only have three hours for the whole meeting - about what you have been doing since the fire and since these issues have come up to look at your buildings?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I am not on the housing management side but our housing management operation has gone through a similar process as Su has gone through at some length, so I will not go back over that. We are a borough with a small stock of high-rise buildings and quite a few of the ones we have are of brick-built construction and so on. Once those have all been looked at in detail the issue that has really come up for us is around Bison construction buildings, a type similar to Ronan Point, where there is that risk of progressive collapse. There the most significant issue is reviewing our Estate Regeneration Programme with a view to whether we should be bringing some, or all, of these blocks forward in the demolition programme. For example, we have schemes where - for perfectly logical and sensible reasons - there are phases 1, 2, 3 and 4 and there are Bison blocks in the later phases. As part of the process of reviewing the master plan for those Estate Regeneration Schemes we are looking at whether you could bring

forward those Bison blocks in the programme so they are dealt with in phase 2 for example, phase 1 already being in train. That is a significant issue for us.

The other significant issue is the greater awareness around the whole issue of fire safety and building safety. We look after the planning service for the Council. The building regulations have been found wanting in this instance and the process in terms of the use of approved inspectors has also been found wanting. As the Planning Authority, we will increasingly be asking difficult questions around fire safety and the building regulations of developers who are using approved inspectors. One of the things we would like to do is promote the use of Council building control more on the basis that this is a service that is provided onsite, there are people who can go out to regularly visit and inspect buildings under construction. Custom practice in the approved inspector market has been a lot of it is done by 'desktop' and often very remotely. There is a real issue there so that is an issue we will push on in future.

In terms of our new-build stock this reinforces the message you have to get the design and build quality right, the operation in use right and make sure what is being built - we have an extensive programme of new-build Council stock - is absolutely right in terms of design and robustness of that particular product. That is something we will look at. Clearly, fire safety, means of escape and everything else are up there.

The other longer-term issue is looking at the heights of buildings and what works and does not work. We are a relatively low-rise borough and viability in the private sector mitigates against going much above 10 or 12 storeys because the value is not there. However, that is an issue for us, as the planning authority and a development body, in terms of making sure that high-rise development is generally liveable in and will work in practise. Fire safety and the means of evacuation is just a part of that discussion. Use of materials is clearly quite important.

There are potential knock-on issues as well from the regeneration point of view. Clearly, cladding at the moment is deeply unpopular. Brick was already popular but there are significant issues around the supply of brick and also with some of the potential issues around the supply of bricklayers, particularly if we are to leave the single market and the Customs Union etc.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We might get on to that later. You said you do not have that many high rises. Does that mean you have not really been doing a review of fire safety? There must have been calls from residents to do that.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** No, there has been a very thorough review by My Place, which is a housing company that we do not directly operate. We operate the contractor side in terms of administration of some of the works. Again, significant works have been done in terms of removal of cladding and improvement of fire protection where applicable. We do not have the sort of enormous high-rise stock that Su [Gomer] has. It is in the low teens in terms of the number of high-rise buildings that we have. We are predominately a very low-rise borough with a lot of low-rise housing.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** In terms of releasing FRAs, how is that being managed by you?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** We do not manage that. My Place, which is our housing company, manage that. I am not in a position to comment, to be honest. I know they are making them available but it is not our area. We act as the client for works which they commission. We do Estate Regeneration and Development.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** It seems there has not been any financial impact so far but there may be knock-on effects in the future?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** There was an initial additional cost that was met by the repair and refurbishment programmes that have moved forward. In the long term that will knock back. There are potentially some other longer-term costs in terms of construction of new properties potentially but, again, we will look to mitigate those. There are some costs that will be met from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and possibly some increases in long-term cost but probably containable.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** You are not looking to recover anything from the Government therefore?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I am not directly at this stage. The Housing Service may well put something in. However, it was not an enormous amount. We moved some work forward but we were in a fairly good place anyway.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Shall we move on to Chyrel Brown from Hyde? Hyde has an awful lot of homes.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We do.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** How many homes do you have in London?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** In London, just over 20,000 homes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Do you want to tell us how you dealt with these issues?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Grenfell changed everything for us. We revisited our fire strategy to say, "Do we know what we know and is it still robust in this current time?" From that we took a position that we need to understand how our buildings are performing and what we have done since that building was built that could have impacted on that building. We then took the approach to identify our high rises. We have just over 100. We only have one building with a similar cladding to what happened at Grenfell. From there we took the stance of, "Do we trust our buildings?" We did 'desktops' and type 1 FRAs but on the high rises we moved up to type 4s. The challenge for us, when you are doing type 4s, is how it - because you are basically going in and looking for every avenue and every hole - throws up a lot of subsequent works. Residents also wanted to understand what we are doing in terms of those intrusive surveys in giving us access to their homes. When you do those surveys, people want to know what you have found and what you are doing about it.

From my side, in terms of housing management, we always took a zero-tolerance approach to communal bikes and equipment left in hallways. When we have properties that are challenged by space - in terms of where people put their stuff; the prams, buggies and motor scooters - that becomes a management issue of how you educate residents in terms of, "This is what you need to do" or "This is where you need to store that equipment". At the same time, we worked with the Fire Brigade, who came around and helped us inspect some of our buildings, turning up with their engines and giving residents assurance that we are all working in partnership to make sure we are consistent with our message.

We have also had residents request the FRAs we have done across our buildings. We have not released the FRAs wholesale across our schemes. The approach we are taking with FRAs is that the type 1s are a moment in time. We are trying to find a way of explaining the FRAs because we have noticed that when we provide FRAs it comes back with a whole load of questions about, "What about my doors? Am I safe? What does this

mean?" Putting it out without an understanding or explanation increases the enquiries we get. We do appreciate the need to be visible and we do appreciate the need to be transparent. However, it is a balance between providing the information and an explanation about what we are doing and the subsequent works.

In terms of the challenges for us as an organisation, because of the volumes we are now doing in type 4s it is about the internal skills, drawing upon team members and moving them into a specialist team to do this work for us and then the subcontractors for the things we have to do around scaffolding, tendering of safety, putting that up for our site works and working with our development team. The prices we are paying for consultants has slowly crept up in the competitive market as we are all using the same consultants or same people.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** It sounds like you have a programme of works.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We do.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Is it quite extensive? You said there is the one block that has similar cladding. What have you done with that so far and how much has it cost?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** For the one block with similar cladding we are working with the Fire Brigade regarding what we do about when we take down the cladding. We have done the sample checks. We have worked with the Fire Brigade. We have a fire ordinance in place in terms of mitigation while the cladding is up. We spent lots of money doing that in terms of having patrols night and day and updating our residents. At the same time - just like my colleague, Su - we have to find a mechanism of what to replace it with. While that was unknown residents were challenging us about, "When it is coming down? How is our building going to look? "What are you going to replace it with?" That is the bit where we are stuck in terms of regulation, about what is appropriate in terms of, not just the cladding itself but, all the components that sit underneath it, especially as we have done window upgrades and all the other things that you do in a big refurbishment. It is the whole system you have to look at. That is why we have a programme looking at it from start to end.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** This is a question for all three of the people who have spoken so far really. Have you changed any of the advice to residents in terms of what to do in the event of a fire? Are you putting in place things like marshals? I know that can be costly as well.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We have been challenged by some of residents around 'staying put', what that means for them and what happens if there is a fire. For the one building with cladding we have wardens there 24/7. Residents will challenge the cost of that in terms of who is going to bear that cost, and also why they need to be there. Some residents see that as a hindrance and some residents really want them there. We have also had the Fire Brigade give us advice about what they need to do and how we need to provide training for those marshals who are onsite as well.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** For ourselves the guidance clearly is the Fire Brigade's guidance. It is not the owner's guidance. The Fire Brigade will give you guidance on what to do if there is a change to the 'stay put' policy. We have been following that and talking that through with residents. One the cladding was removed and the Fire Brigade enforcement notice was completed we removed the waking watch, having liaised with our residents about that. It is the same in another block where we had an enforcement notice.

We meet with the Fire Brigade every month as part of our corporate fire safety team, sharing information and guidance in terms of any changes to the 'stay put' policy or guidance.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Have you made any changes to any blocks as a result of their guidance?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** No, because the guidance from the Fire Brigade is 'stay put'. With the block where we discovered the cladding was in place, like my colleague, there was a set process that everybody had to follow in terms of waking watch, liaising with the Fire Brigade central team, taking guidance from the Fire Brigade and liaising with ourselves as the Council as a competent officer. We were certainly making sure we took all of the guidance with the Fire Brigade as we went along. We did not remove the waking watch until we liaised with the Fire Brigade. In terms of the 'stay put' policy, that is still there. There are some changes to the 'stay put' policy in some of our private sector stock but that is not the subject for this scrutiny.

**Tom Copley AM:** I was trying to work out whether I should bring one of my questions in now or later. It is on the Government's consultation on this Approved Document B. Can I bring that in now?

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We are not supposed to be looking at building regulations themselves.

**Tom Copley AM:** It is a very quick one because Inside Housing has revealed that the Government are inclined to include controversially approved 'desktop studies', which are far less reliable and effective than large-scale testing. I was wondering whether each of the organisations here was going to be putting in a response to that consultation.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We worked with [Dame] Judith Hackitt [Chair, EEF] in terms of the input into the interim Building Regulations Review. Our need is for clarification. Approved Document B is confusing and there are many interpretations of Approved Document B. What we have done is look at the guidance that is coming out in terms of what the materials are we can use.

Regarding the issue in terms of 'desktop studies', with the enhanced FRA4s that we are carrying out some of the findings say, "Whilst construction was in accordance with building regulations you should reassure yourself by further testing of your structures". The Fire Brigade has given us some approved testing stations. We are then looking at the feasibility of how we move to look at that large-scale testing. As you would know from the information that is coming out from the guidance and the press, there is not an agreed approval as to what structural full-scale testing should be. The suggestion for ourselves that we take some mock-ups of our full structures, stick them in the Dubai Desert and test them is perhaps not feasible, that is where one of the approved testing stations is. We are liaising with other councils and with providers to look at how we do that approved testing. There are issues with 'desktop studies'. We understand that because, as the media said, 'desktop studies' can be interpreted in the way that somebody wants to interpret them, as can approved inspectors. There is a nervousness about that. We have fed into the Building Regulations Review our concerns, as Pat said, about approved inspectors and also testing itself. One point about the issue of approved inspectors, some of our registered social landlord stock that had failed in terms of ACM had all been approved by approved inspectors and not the Council, which is an issue [of concern] for us.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Assembly Member Devenish, you have a quick follow-up question?

**Tony Devenish AM:** We all know build costs are going up anyway, particularly in London. The broad question is, are you having to basically gold-plate anything or enhance any risk management systems when



you are doing new build or refurbishing or maintenance after Grenfell? Can you give us any feel in terms of the percentage build cost increase? I know that is a very difficult question.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Possibly a question for the end of the session, Assembly Member Devenish, I am afraid.

**Tony Devenish AM:** OK, apologies.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Assembly Member Gavron might be leading on that in a bit. Can we stick to what people have been doing to reassess fire safety in existing buildings and to correct any defects? That is what we are trying to ask about here. Andy, you manage a smaller number of homes. How have you dealt with this?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** I just want to give a quick bit of context and then raise five issues, if I may? We are a TMO. We manage 1,500 properties. We have five tower blocks. Fortunately, none of them are clad and also, fortunately, none of them are system built in the way that Pat was talking about.

The first challenge is in the name. We are a TMO and, of course, Kensington and Chelsea was a TMO. The first thing is that Kensington and Chelsea was on a different scale to every other TMO; the normal size is 200 properties. In terms of perception, and talking to colleagues about this, for TMOs other than Kensington and Chelsea the view from tenants is, "We trusted you to manage our properties well the day before Grenfell Tower, and we trust you to manage our properties well the day after Grenfell Tower". Certainly, it has changed the external perception of TMO, which is a challenge for us.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Can I get some clarification? My understanding is that Kensington and Chelsea isn't the tenant management name is not what we think of as property management, it is an arm's-length management organisation (ALMO).

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** It was a TMO before it became an ALMO.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** No, it was a TMO for years and years and years. It was only in the last six, or maybe even five, years that it took on responsibility for large improvement schemes, like project managing putting the cladding onto the external blocks. Before that it was very large but it was a TMO.

**Tom Copley AM:** Now it is gone but it was an ALMO.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Now it does not exist.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Shall we get Andy to explain this because he is our guest giving us the evidence.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** I will see if I can help with this. This is a very partisan view from the tenant-management world. We think it is an ALMO that was misbranded or misbranded itself as a TMO. Certainly, it is a very different beast to every other TMO.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** No, for 20 years it was correctly branded and then after that it changed.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** That is not really the question anyway. How have you managed with the fire safety issues that have arisen through your different structure?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** We are based in Southwark. Southwark had the Lakanal Fire a few years ago so fire safety is very much top of the Southwark agenda and we work very closely on this. Southwark already had a very skilled fire safety team in place. The issue for us on the ground is that that very skilled fire safety team then went into overdrive. It has definitely had a huge impact on the workload of our repair team and also on housing officers as well. To put this into context my Board had to make an emergency allocation of £50,000 - and we have a turnover of £2 million - just to deal with the kind of responsive repair issues that were thrown up as a consequence of the intensified fire safety checks that Southwark were doing.

To run through issues very quickly. The challenge on the ground is always major works, getting value for money from contractors and getting tight supervision from consultants. We have talked to lots of right-to-buy leaseholders and talked to lots of housing managers. This was very much an issue pre-Grenfell and it will certainly be one of the things that the inquiry looks at.

The second thing is around cost. As people before me have said, there is now intrusive surveys being done looking at the issues of compartmentalisation. The 'stay put' policy is based on flats being compartmentalised and fire staying in the flat. That happens in 99% of cases, which is really important to say. People do not yet know the cost implications of those compartmentalisation tests.

To give a quick run through on costs. We, in Southwark, are offering every resident integrated electrical alarms, the average cost of that £618 per person.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Fire alarms?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Fire alarms. Fire resistant doors with door closers are £1,200. We are starting to look at the cost of sprinklers. Talking to colleagues, the costs are varying widely between £3,000 and £10,000 per property. Southwark is working on an average cost of £6,500 to retrofit. There is also an issue around mechanical ventilation system, making sure they do not suck smoke from one flat to another. There the cost varies widely between £300 and £2,500. Lots of mechanical ventilation systems contain asbestos, which makes it hideously expensive. For a small organisation like us, that gives us a bill of £2.5 million when we eventually do all this work.

Talking with residents is a complex issue. Fortunately for us, as a TMO, our residents are used to us talking to them about complicated issues. For organisations that are trying to do this from a standing start it must be enormously difficult. I have listened to the discussion about releasing the FRAs. The FRAs have to be released but they have to be released with information attached to them as well.

The other issue is about who lives in tower blocks. There are two big issues. One is that there is no responsibility for leaseholders to tell us who is living there. That was one of the issues at Grenfell, working out who was living there. Secondly, the intensity of housing needs means we cannot not put people in tower blocks who would have extreme difficulty getting out if there was a fire.

The last issue is around training and education. Obviously there has been lots of soul searching amongst housing professionals, after both Lakanal [3 July 2009] and Grenfell [14 June 2017]. One of the things that we accept is that lots of us with experience and professional qualifications that we kind of learn stuff as a consequence of the Grenfell Inquiry. We learn stuff as a consequence of the Grenfell Inquiry that we really did

not know and probably should have known. Finally, post-Grenfell there are experts coming forward to say, “Yes, we knew this was an issue”. The challenge is to get the information out to people like us, managing on the ground, before we learn it is an issue as a consequence of a tragedy.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you. That was really helpful. Obviously, you have residents on your Board, you are more tenant managed than most. You said about FRAs and that sort of thing, and not wanting to release them, is that right? You mentioned fire doors. Even a non-intrusive FRA would identify whether or not the fire doors were adequate. Would that not have been in the FRAs and would you not have had a more open programme of works to deal with that?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** We have taken a decision to release FRAs and they are up on our website. However, that is mixed with a really intensive information exercise, talking to our representative groups, our tenant associations and also visiting people individually in our tower blocks. Therefore, people are not just seeing the FRAs in isolation, they are seeing it in the context of other information.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Yes, that is more helpful. Assembly Member Gavron?

**Nicky Gavron AM:** When this was the Planning and Housing Committee up to 2012 we did an inquiry into Lakanal. We were not the only people who did an inquiry. There were lots of publications on lessons to be learnt. What did Southwark learn from Lakanal and what is it that you learnt more from Grenfell? Southwark was really onto it, learning the lessons of that terrible fire.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** I need to be clear that I represent Leathermarket JMB, I do not represent Southwark. If maybe I can talk about secondary lessons? They were very much around ensuring compartmentalisation, and secondly doing regular fire checks and also around learning about the problem of mechanical ventilation systems. As I say, if you get somebody officially from Southwark they might give you a different explanation to that but that is our learning on the ground.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** And then from Grenfell?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It obviously depends on what comes out of the inquiry. My particular take on it is that for something like Grenfell to happen a whole series of things need to go wrong at the same time. It is about identifying those issues, managing those issues and making sure you do not get that coincidence.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Many of the things we are talking about were already discovered during the Lakanal investigation. I find it very disturbing that those lessons really have not been taken up and learnt.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you. That was really useful as an overview. The reason I might seem slightly obsessed with FRAs is because although the basic FRAs do not look into things like compartmentalisation they do bring up things like fire doors and the fabric of communal areas. Those things are quite simple to deal with. Yet, when you look at some of the FRAs that have been released, they are things that might say, “Deal with it within a year” and then three, four or five years later they are not dealt with. That worries me a little bit. The questions we are asking you are about whether it has brought urgency to reviewing and getting on with some of these things that maybe ought to have been done a few years ago. I do not know if any of you want to comment on that?

At the same time, I have one final question that is about leaseholders. Obviously, leaseholders have far more control of their flats and also pay towards works on the building as a whole. They are a special case here in that they may need to be managed differently and also might be facing quite serious impacts with some of the work. We might talk about the leaseholder issues and also the backlog of more basic work that needed to be done.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** In terms of leaseholders, we have heightened the information given to leaseholders and also our actions, liaising with our engagement groups - the Leasehold Council, as it was, and the Future Engagement Groups - and leaseholders throughout our estates. We have ensured that on our housing management fire safety website there is specific guidance for leaseholders in terms of what we expect them to be doing and what their obligations are, including things about what the standards for their front entrance door should be. Our position is that where we note that leaseholders have not changed their front entrance doors, or something, we will send letters to them requiring them to change their doors, noting the guidance that is out there. The Council then, has not yet but would, move to enforcement actions if leaseholders are not responding. That could mean either we make them change the doors or we do works in default. Specifically, in terms of the priorities in relation to our medium and high-rise blocks, as I mentioned already, our risk-tolerance is heightened post-Grenfell. We are becoming more of an enforcer of the leaseholders.

There is often a difficulty, as was noted, when leaseholds are sold on and, in fact, leaseholders become the landlord. There is a different relationship with leaseholders. The other point, of course, is where we have carried out leasehold enfranchisement where the leaseholders own the property of the building and our tenants then become their accountability. It is a different governance form. The actions you would need to take would be private sector legislation. In general, in relation to leaseholders there is more information going out there.

A number of leaseholders have come back to us saying they were happy about the guidance they have in terms of what should be replaced. When leaseholders apply to buy, under the right-to-buy package, there would be more information going out in terms of what the obligations would be, making sure that they have carried out more surveys themselves when they are looking to buy in relation to what they are taking on. The position could be that a leaseholder might have bought when the fire door at that time complied with the relevant fire safety legislation. Some years hence the fire safety legislation changes and it does not. The Council has a major programme where it is going around changing its front entrance doors and is encouraging leaseholders to liaise with us on that.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I had experience with my previous authority, Ealing, where I was in charge of housing management. Post-Lakanal we did an enormous amount of work in terms of making sure that both tenants and leaseholders complied with very clear guidance on cluttering corridors and storage. We had a major campaign with leaseholders around their doors. We did force people to replace doors. There was a significant issue with leaseholders replacing possibly inelegant but effective Council doors with extremely flammable plastic doors. We also had some tenants and leaseholders remove security gates that had been put for understandable reasons but would have prevented access by the Fire Brigade to parts of blocks, for example.

A lot of lessons were learnt and were acted on post-Lakanal in terms of housing management, including tenant communication around some of these issues, "You cannot keep your buggy out there", training and work with caretakers and other management staff in terms of, "Yes, it is nice to let people wedge the door open but you must not let them do it".

The lessons that have come out post-Grenfell are far more technical for most authorities, assuming authorities or housing associations were on the ball in terms of management. It is now much more about the fact there are interventions in buildings that are cumulative. For example, historically asbestos may have been removed for entirely good reasons; then something else was removed, again for entirely good reasons; ducting was put in for cable television, again for entirely good reasons; and then further physical work carried out up to and including cladding. They were all correct technically at the time according to the regulations but clearly those changes, when they are applied cumulatively, can be significant. Some of the things that were signed off by the Fire Brigade - if I go back to the example in my previous role - as being adequate because there were other countermeasures in place that were proved to be potentially not acceptable. That is the lesson for us now post-Grenfell. Possibly the management lessons were learnt post-Lakanal. It is now about looking at the physical structure, particularly for those of us working on housing regeneration and refurbishment, and the cumulative effect of different actions and how that may add up. For those involved in planning and building control it is making sure there is greater scrutiny and checks around the functionality of products and design.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Just like my colleagues, we have very clear key performance indicators (KPIs) around fire safety, tracking actions and outstanding actions for FRAs, putting them in a programme and setting stringent timelines for when those actions are to be completed. Since Grenfell, it is revisiting those actions and heightening our tolerance given the fact our risk appetite has gone up considering what has happened. From a programme of over a year for some of those actions we are no longer tolerating that, and we have heightened what we will do in a shorter timeframe. In addition to that, as we do the type 4s we are getting on and doing those works as we identify anything that comes out of that. In terms of actions and closing them down that is measured and reported up to our executive management team on fire.

With regard to what we do in terms of the wider discussion, the outcomes of Grenfell for us are about revisiting our strategy completely. We need to make sure that the clarity of what we do is far more transparent in terms of residents and leaseholders understanding it. For example, our website very clearly tells leaseholders about the importance of doors and gas safety checks. We have a zero tolerance for Airbnb. Residents do not seem to understand about the subsequent implications on the rest of the block. We are far clearer in our message that, "These are the reasons why and this is action we are going to take".

We have not followed doors in terms of doing the doors ourselves. We are telling residents the time will come when we will have to take that approach if it is not done.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** That sounds very useful, thank you.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** There has been an absolutely sea change post Grenfell. All the leaseholders we get understand fire safety, one because they want to be safe and two, because they want to have a property they can sell. Lots of the issues we were grappling with before Grenfell have fallen away post-Grenfell.

One issue that is worth mentioning is that if leaseholders do any structural changes to the property they should get permission from the landlord. We know that has not always been the case. We have certainly written to all leaseholders saying, "You should have asked our permission but talk to us now". It has been a useful exercise. A common thing that leaseholders have done is to knock the kitchen into the living room, and then there is a staircase going up from there to the bedrooms. The fire officers have been around to say, "Look, for the sake of a couple of hundred pounds put a door at the top or the bottom of the staircase". It has been a really useful information-giving exercise.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** You just talked about structural change. One of the things that came out of Lakanal was the amount of minor drilling into the walls, breaking the fire wall. It is little bits of DIY all over the place. Nobody has mentioned that. I mention it because it should go up on the websites. That was one of the big lessons learnt.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** That was a significant issue in the major fire that occurred in Ealing 20 years ago that spread at a similar speed to Grenfell, but fortunately it was a slab block rather than a tower block. That was entirely caused by the fact there had been drilling for cable television and everything else by both tenants and leaseholders all the way through the fire breaks in the roof.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** That is right so that needs to be really registered.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** You were talking about forcing leaseholders to change doors and also forcing them to keep the fire exit routes, from their flats, clear. I know both of those are management issues and in some cases, it is undertaking the work to replace the doors for them. A thorny issue that we have not touched on is whether or not they should be forced to fit sprinklers inside their own dwellings as part of an overall approach to improving a block. Is that something that you started to enter into discussion on with leaseholders? Is it something that, if you are undertaking a programme of putting sprinklers in the tenanted areas and in the common parts, you would then also do it in the leaseholder-owned dwellings as well in a building?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We are part of the London Councils meeting so we hear what is going on and we liaise with the Fire Brigade as well. I also took part in the Department for Communities and Local Government weekly conversations back in the summer to hear what other people are doing. We are carrying out, as I mentioned, a study into the feasibility of installing sprinklers in our medium, high-rise and complex blocks. We will see the options that come out of that. We do know that there are some landlords who put sprinklers just in communal areas, some who just put them in the internal flats and some do both. There is one Council that did not want to pass on charges to leaseholders for sprinklers and therefore agreed with the Fire Brigade in its particular borough that they would miss out the leaseholders and that coverage of three-quarters of the block was better than not having coverage of any of the block. We want to be clear about the technical feasibility, about what is the prime deterrent in terms of when sprinklers will be used and then we would look at the issue of charging.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** I will come on to the issue of charging in a moment, which was the follow-up question I have. As the Chair said, leaseholders are recharged and they are, but not for everything. For me regarding the legal position of asking people to put sprinklers in, I am not clear whether that is an improvement or an absolutely essential upgrade and whether it is something you can recharge for or not. I am not personally clear on that. Fitting sprinklers in three-quarters of a building sounds a bit odd to me. It will be good to hear from the rest of you what you think of that and also what you have been doing.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We do think it is odd. In terms of looking at the feasibility the prime issue is going to, clearly, be safety. We will be taking guidance from the Fire Brigade as part of this feasibility study as well. Sometimes there is an issue, "We would not want sprinklers in a communal area" if you have a high rise that has one means of escape with residents going down the means of escape and being sprinkled on. It may be the Fire Brigade would want to have a view on what we should do about that.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Is that the same for the rest of you, you are making the same sorts of decisions?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We are working through feasibility, looking at the buildings, looking at the volume of leaseholders, looking at whether it will be communal or individual and looking at the risk base in terms of the type of residents that live in the scheme. We have a number of assumptions to work through before we get to a conclusion. With so many different competing aspects it is difficult right now to nail down a position as an organisation.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** There is a significant policy issue for boroughs as leaseholders effectively fall into two classes; there are occupier leaseholders and leaseholders who may have a number of leasehold properties. It is whether you want to treat them slightly differently because they are effectively a commercial undertaking, and offer a discount, support or free work for people who, according to circumstance, are resident leaseholders that you may not apply to people who are commercial leaseholders. Again, that is a matter for individual authorities, but it is an issue to consider.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** You have the same position as well. Obviously, you said you have enfranchised in certain cases as well.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Our borough has.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** There are the same sorts of arguments because they are effectively the freeholder.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Exactly, they are the client. It is part of the criteria about what enfranchisement obligations are. The point by Pat and yourself about what does the lease say whether the lessee is a resident, non-resident or a leaseholder, we already take account of that sort of thing in the repayment options that we offer to leaseholders in terms of what we offer to resident leaseholders and non-resident leaseholders.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** In terms of perhaps spreading the payments if they have to make a contribution?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Absolutely.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Or holding a charge on the property, for example, for work that is done. Say you have an elderly individual living in a property that you wish to do some work to, you enable them to hold that as a charge against the property when it is sold by their inheritors when they die, for example.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** I know lawyers are earning lots of money trying to answer your question about whether sprinklers would be an improvement or repair but I definitely agree with the thrust of your question. If there are going to be sprinklers they have to be everywhere. Alarms are an example of this. The approach that Southwark has taken is, "Look, if you are going to put in alarms you need to put them in everywhere". Southwark has used general fund money to offer alarms to leaseholders at no cost rather than HRA money.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** OK, so it has not drawn on the HRA for that?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** No.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** That is interesting. Obviously, in the situation then of a block where you have 75% leaseholders and 25% tenants it makes it even more acute that something is done.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Absolutely. The prime responsibility has to be fire safety, regardless of the governance, the vehicles or who lives in there.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Very quickly on that, of course, the prime responsibility is fire safety. That has always been the case, before Grenfell or after. However, we are revisiting that. One wonders who is liable in terms of retrofitting sprinklers. Is it the leaseholder who owns the property or the people who sold it to them, not telling them they needed it?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It is the current leaseholder. The way that leasehold law works is that you take on all the obligations so it is definitely the current leaseholder.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Are there not grounds for that leaseholder to say, "When I bought this property I was not aware this was going to be a requirement"?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** No, because it is the nature of the contract. Even if that person owed money you would still take on responsibility. It is one of the peculiarities of the leasehold contract.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Ok, thank you.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** The significant leasehold issue is if you are an existing leaseholder wishing to sell now. If you have bought in a tower block it will be significantly more difficult or, in a sense, very difficult.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** The speed of clearing this all up is paramount.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Pat, you are doing a lot of work on new build, yes?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Yes.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** First of all to backtrack, you have talked about possibly bringing forward some tower blocks for demolition rather than refurbishment, is that right?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** For ones that it has already been agreed will be demolished, whether - because of concerns around Bison construction and degassing - it is better to bring them forward in the programme. For example, if we had a number of blocks that were in a later phase in a large estate scheme. It is whether we can change the phasing, so it is less geographically logical but possibly more logical in building type to bring them forward in the programme.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Got it, that was just a clarification.



**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** There is a particular issue around the fact they have had to be degassed and there are further concerns arising out of Bison blocks from the case in Southwark, for example.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** System built, you mean?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Yes, Bison is a brand of system-built concrete slab.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Looking to the future, how is what we have all been learning going to affect the blocks you are going to build? What are you looking for in future buildings in terms of quality, standards, design and all of this?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I would hope it would not affect what we are going to do. Our aspiration in building large-volume housing for the public sector - as essentially a wholly owned public sector company - is to get the best possible design. Because we do not have the pressure in terms of shareholder income or the house builder etc, etc, we are able to do things that possibly the private sector would not wish to do or be able to do. Having said that, there are some really important issues, sprinklers being one. Do we put sprinklers in everything? Do we put sprinklers in over a certain height? Are there certain materials that we do not use because we think that although you can use them at the moment there may be concerns longer term? Our default position recently has been largely towards brick construction anyway, for aesthetic reasons as much as anything else and thermal efficiency etc. There are issues there.

One of the other issues is, again, around design, layout, the number of units off a core etc, as we play those through.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Let us go into the number around a core. What would be better?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I do not think anything is necessarily better but it is thinking it through. If you have a particular number of units around a core, what is the means of escape? If you have more then you need more means of escape.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Are you looking at two means of escape?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Potentially, yes. That may well be an issue. On a Build-to-rent Scheme, where you are talking eight units off a core, do you have two means of escape? No. That is one of the things we would test for the structural effect in terms of our design process. The Swedes have a model where they only do three units off a core; perhaps that is too small.

The other issue for me is around the modular-built housing system of the current generation. Clearly that has some attraction in terms of speed of delivery, although less so in cost at the moment.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** The more scale you have, the cheaper it will be.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Yes, but there are also some major issues. If you are thinking about a high-rise block with a timber frame of modular construction there is potential for that to go wrong. You need to really understand issues like fire proofing and spread of fire if - coming back to this point, which is one of the lessons from Grenfell - over time people do things to it as

technology and everything else evolves. You may have a system that is really, really robust as designed and as built but how will it respond 20 years hence when people have done all sorts of different things to it.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Absolutely.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Like what?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Drilled through it and knocked walls out.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** That can happen in any building.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** It can happen in any building but there are particular issues around modular at the moment, because it is a technology that is in its infancy. We do need to ask quite challenging questions about it at this stage. I am an advocate of modular. It does provide some real advantages. However, we do have to be very careful that, having spent the last 30 years probably doing a lot of demolition and removal of system-built social housing schemes, we do not build another problem by rushing to modular now. We need to ask challenging questions at this stage.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** It is interesting what you say about the timber frame. When we did the investigation previously for Lakanal we looked at timber-framed high rises and the real issue was when it was being constructed in terms of the fire risk, not when it was there. You make a point, again, that the effect DIY and refurbishment will have on these buildings needs looking at.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** As we mentioned, it is also things, in terms of wholly owned Council companies, what the policy is on Airbnb, for example. There are some simple management issues if you are building stock, what are your new rules, if you are doing build-to-rent. There are significant issues around some of that stuff.

You are absolutely right in terms of modular and timber frame, it works really well. There is a real issue during construction around fire risk. However, we need to make sure that what goes in -- we do not create a problem for the future.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** The Planning Committee has done a report on modular, and we looked very carefully at cross laminated timber and have seen how very, very strong and robust it is in relation to fire. You are talking about other forms of timber, are you?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** We have to make sure that in an environment where there is a rush for very rapid delivery that we get it right, that speed of delivery does not trump other issues, and that we are forward thinking in terms of thinking about what will happen to this over time, particularly if you end up with a mixed-tenure situation. There was a time when most council blocks had a single landlord and it was very, very clear. We are now in a position where the situation is not clear because there are leaseholders, leasehold landlords and there may well be freeholders in certain accommodation. It is a very different management proposition.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** That seems to me to be a lesson for all structures.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** We need to make sure what we build is capable of surviving in those conditions and is easy to manage and maintain in those conditions.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Would any of the other guests like to comment on that issue? We have Su Gomer here from Lambeth. We were expecting Sue Foster [OBE, Strategic Director Neighbourhoods and Growth, London Borough of Lambeth] as well who does more of the building and regeneration work but she has been unable to come at the last minute. We may not be able to ask quite so many questions of Lambeth on that type of issue.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Who should do the testing of all these materials, Pat, and do the sign off?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** This is a matter for more Government legislation. This review of building control and the building regulations is important but does not go far enough. There probably needs to be much greater investment in terms of national testing of materials. That will also help establish the Industry. If you are referring to modular, one of the big issues is whether you can get a mortgage and insure it. That is a very variable picture across all different types.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** It is not robust but it is getting better.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** It is getting better. It needs a single well-resourced body to carry out testing and approval on all these materials. This goes back to the point that Su made about where testing facilities are available at the moment.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Can I just say one other thing? Building regulations fail dismally on thermal efficiency because they do not do the pressure door test. I have never met a building inspector who does a pressure door test. About 60 - 70% now of our buildings are leaky, brand new buildings. That is also a fire hazard. I would like your reaction on that.

When the building inspectors come in - I do not know whether they are your own building inspectors or outsourced and privatised in your borough - will you be doing the overseeing?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** On our own schemes, clearly, we will use our own building control. At the moment we have no power to force private developers to use Council building control. Actually, the system is set up in a way that it encourages them, and also leads them, not to for all sorts of reasons. At the moment the situation is yes, I would probably argue that this open market should be much more restricted and that certainly for taller and bigger buildings and bigger schemes you should have to use Council building control, or Council building control should have to sign off the work of approved inspectors at appropriate points for larger-scale schemes. Obviously, for a loft extension and things like that there is probably a role for that market to operate in. Certainly, on these larger-scale buildings what you see is that major house builders have a single contractor, often with a single approved inspector, for the whole country and they all do it from their desk in Cardiff in the main [office]. That is a concern.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** Do you think there is seduction in this process?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Sorry?

**Nicky Gavron AM:** It is quite something to say but the whole thing goes the spectrum of seduction to corruption. I am very worried by how easy it is to sign off something, to just do the 'tick box' of building inspectors.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Well, I think that it has just become the nature. It is interesting that in some other European countries planning is much more low key and building control, or its equivalent, is much more predominant. We are in a position where in the UK a market was set up around building control and building regulations were not seen as being particularly important. The Government did not regularly refresh them, there was not much investment in them and it was seen as being something that almost is a 'tick-box' exercise at the side. Planning was important. You get your planning consent but then the building controls process that followed after it could be done by anybody.

One of the lessons of Grenfell is that, as a country and as an industry, we need to take building regulations, construction and design much more seriously. Therefore, greater weight should be given to that area. As a local authority if you miss your planning approvals you get told off, if you do not turn your planning appeals around at eight weeks and 16 weeks, etc, etc. You do not really have to provide much of a building control service. Successive governments were quite happy if you did not because you got more scrutiny from auditors in terms of, "Are you overcharging for your building control services and unfairly competing with the private inspectors?" The whole status and view of that particular operation has been downgraded and potentially to unfortunate effect.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** That is interesting.

**Tom Copley AM:** It is worrying.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** That is what we have seen as it has been introduced. That remark is really, really helpful, thank you. Will you on your new build, Pat, therefore be making sure there is a pressure door test?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I had not thought of that particular one but I am sure the relevant professionals have a view on that. The issue with new build is also how you contain the amount of heat from electrical equipment within them, their thermal efficiency and also their ventilation. There is a real issue there. If you look at a lot of combined heat and power schemes that are put in, they are never used at full efficiency because the buildings are so thermally efficient they are too warm most of the time and there probably are other fire safety issues around computers, information technology (IT) and all that other stuff which heats up flats and also generates a lot of heat at particular points.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** There are rules around the wrong kind of ventilation and so on, but enough.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you, Assembly Member Gavron.

I am going to introduce the next session now because we have been talking quite specifically about lessons about fire safety so far and in quite technical terms and that is right because we wanted to know how you had reacted to those. We are moving on to further questions now about the involvement of residents in, first of all, safety, then in governance and then in regeneration.

I really want to make sure that we stick to the general case. We are not just talking about the fire anymore; we are talking about how in general things are dealt with. I just wanted to give some guidance on that because I can see that we would spend a lot of time talking about specifics if we are not careful.

We have three sections of questions to come and we have just over an hour, and so it is not too bad. Assembly Member Kurten, you are starting off with safety issues?

**David Kurten AM:** Thank you. Yes. Good morning. I will start with you, Chyrel, if I can, about resident involvement with health and safety and so on. Have you made any changes to resident involvement in those issues - health and safety procedures - since the Grenfell fire happened?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Since Grenfell, I would say that we have heightened our resident communication and what we put out to residents following what happened in the fire in terms of giving them more visibility about our inspections: when we are going to be out there, what we do, and what tolerance we have in terms of things in communal areas and fire risk. In terms of our engaged groups and our recognised TRAs, we always work with them about what we do and how we do it, and so they have always been involved in our procurement process, getting involved in what we do with our contractors. However, we are still adapting our strategy about the longer term in terms of fire safety, and then we will go out to those residents and share it. We have residents on our Group Board and a structure that leads up to our Group Board, and so we all share that information. Our website and the documentation that we are putting out proactively is our first tool at the moment that we are using.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Further than fire safety, there are other hazards that could occur in homes. Are you just focusing on fire or are you taking the procedures to apply to the general codes?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We have used the opportunity in terms of documentation of fire to look at what we are saying about our homes. For example, we have looked as we are going around. We are talking to residents about keeping their homes warm. We have been looking at damp. We have been looking at condensation. We will be looking at ventilation. All the things that are coming up as we are going around doing the inspections we are looking at as a whole.

However, we are understanding how we put out information which is not confusing. That is the bit that for us is around what we put out and in what sequence. What residents are saying at the moment is they are overwhelmed and do not understand. When we are saying about fire wardens or why we have to have it, it is about we tailor the message for each scheme without causing more confusion or questions. For us, it is the quality of the information and the quality of the questions and how we answer those questions.

We have been talking to residents about when we do upgrades, as my colleagues were talking about, in terms of decent homes, making those homes warm and the ventilation and keeping those properties warm as well as ventilated. That has been a challenge for us in terms of residents saying, "You have made it too warm", or, "It is too cold", and they are opening the doors in the communal areas. The works that we have done as improvements in terms of trying to enhance our buildings sometimes have subsequent management issues which we have to re-educate our residents about. Sometimes we do good but cause an adverse effect, and we have to re-educate our residents about the consequences of those things.

**David Kurten AM:** It sounds good and it is good that you have someone on your Board as well. How would you make sure that any issues or concerns do not slip through the net? Say someone had a specific issue - you have mentioned quite a few there - and they are not on the Board, just an ordinary resident. How would they go about informing you and what will you do to make sure that their issue or concern is dealt with?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Our approach is that we have a procedure set out in terms of how we respond to enquiries that come from residents and we track all our cases. If somebody makes a complaint it goes through a complaints process, which we also track. What we are trying to do is arm our frontline teams with general information around health and safety that they can respond to which does not escalate into a complaint.

We do realise that we have had increased volumes of enquiries around health and safety and how we as an organisation respond to that. I am not saying we are perfect as an organisation in terms of things being missed, but, because we have a separate team who are looking at fire safety, anything which is complicated or anything that needs further explanation or understanding we pass to that team. They will give us a general script which we will produce in terms of letters and proactively send that to residents.

If we look at what our data says, say this last week we had had lots of enquiries around what does this type 1 survey mean, instead of waiting for those enquiries to come out we try to put that on our website to proactively stop the volume of enquiries coming back about what is on that type form. At the same time, we have had this approach since Grenfell about 'right first time' about answering enquiries around safety because we know that is something which is really pressurised for our residents at the moment.

We are also working with the Fire Brigade about what we put out as well. When we are doing our inspections with them, we are telling them in advance, "We are going out with the Fire Brigade. This is why. Do not be concerned", and being quite clear about that.

**David Kurten AM:** Thanks. Yes, Andy, did you want to say something about what happens in Leathermarket?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes. This has been very tough on the ground. People have talked about making sure that fire pathways are clear, people are not leaving combustible things around and are taking down gates. There have been practices that have settled in over the years that certainly we are having to challenge with considerably more gusto, which means that we have really had to up our communication strategy. Residents want to be talking to us about fire safety, particularly people who live in the tower blocks. Also, we need to be explaining to people why it is absolutely essential. We have just tried to bombard people with people talking to them on the doorstep, letters going out, using our existing structures, and also having reference points on the website.

In terms of capturing formal interaction, Southwark has set up a dedicated website on fire safety and so, if anybody asks us about fire safety, we would also route it through the Southwark site. It is not just our on-the-ground housing management view; it is also cross-checked by an expert in Southwark's fire safety team. It is very much about what you were saying about making sure that no communication gets missed.

**David Kurten AM:** Yes. It is wonderful that you have set the website up and everything, but there might be a lot of people, especially older people, who do not use websites and who do not go online. How do they get the same access to your frontline teams and the Bboard and the inspections and everything as people who can use the web easily?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We publicise our estate inspections when we are going to be out, and we invite residents to come and support the officers when they are out doing the estate inspections. Also, if they identify things that need to be removed, they write letters or put things on a noticeboard for all the block around that information, explaining why and why we are potentially serving notice on those items. Also, we have learned that we need to really constantly keep those noticeboards refreshed in terms of what we are saying and why we are saying it.

**David Kurten AM:** Are residents involved in your inspection processes if they go on? Andy, do you have residents involved in your inspection teams, oversight teams or anything like that?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** In terms of the current fire safety inspections, they are done by dedicated Southwark staff. In terms of general inspections, yes, we have formal inspections and we publicise them and we encourage resident reps to come along to that.

I really need to emphasise that most social housing tenants would be able to describe to you any big changes in the way that fire safety is being treated on the ground. There are very few housing organisations that have not changed the intensity of the way that they are communicating with residents at the moment.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We have a similar approach as has been described, including what is called a 'Wednesday walkabout'. An estate is picked every Wednesday and residents are involved in walking about and looking at those estates. They include housing management and asset management contractors and so we can get to the front of that.

We do use task-and-finish groups, which are resident-led. We have recently used those task-and-finish groups related to major works and leasehold services where residents are the chairs and are scrutinising us. From that have followed a lot of suggestions and ongoing improvements.

We have a revised engagement process that is taking place in Lambeth which needs to bed down. Part of that includes task-and-finish groups. The suggestion is that we liaise with residents about setting up a task-and-finish group on health and safety so that we can understand what reassurance looks like to residents. We are talking a lot about what we think would reassure residents. We have had a lot of understanding as we have been going along, especially with the heightened process after Grenfell, but there is the issue about doing this and this and this and liaising further with residents in an offside task-and-finish groups to say, "What would reassurance look like to you?" That would be one of our next steps in relation to the other points that we do, which are similar to my colleagues.

**David Kurten AM:** Thank you.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Yes, it was just to find out whether you had done any unannounced inspections. Obviously, if inspections are prearranged and everyone knows they are going to happen, sometimes people change things around a bit. I wondered if that is something that you include in your set of inspections that are carried out.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We do. We have also taken the approach in terms of our teams, that if they are out they are the eyes and the ears of the organisation. Therefore, yes, we have property managers going out and inspecting but, if you are another member of staff or a surveyor or going out on a lettings visit and see something, it has to be reported because you were the last person there. We have taken a firmer stance in terms of training, expectations, reporting and escalating, too.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** That brings me on to my second question, which is about training for residents who are involved in these processes and, also, bringing people together from different blocks and different residents' associations so that they can share learning. How much training are people being given before they are going to do inspections? If you have a network of fire safety champions - in the way that people have had green champions who have worked through issues around fuel quality and suchlike and have taken that back to their different residents' associations - is that network of fire safety champions being trained and developed, is that something you have been doing?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Like my colleagues, we have done a

task-and-finish group in terms of estate inspections and, from that, there are some recommendations for what the residents wanted around further insight in terms of looking for fire safety. That is on our agenda to upskill our residents even further in terms of the work that we do with them, but currently they are not trained to that level.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Personally, I think that you should be getting that extra involvement, getting that level of knowledge and upskilling the residents. The natural thing that we all do is slip back into, “We would like to have that gate and those pot plants because it makes the little bit outside our flat look nicer”. Then the neighbours, who have been trained and know that it should not be there because it is also a fire escape route that is now blocked, can deal with it on an ongoing basis, rather than waiting for the next inspection to happen. It can be valuable from that point of view. Thank you.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** I had one follow-up question to Su. You mentioned - in fact, both Su and Chyrel have mentioned - task-and-finish groups, and you said the residents chair those. Is this a strategic issue across Lambeth like health and safety, or is this on particular estates?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** So yes, when extreme concerns are raised. We had a massive investment programme and there were concerns about major works and leasehold billing. A task-and-finish group was set up to go through that with residents having time aside with officers to scrutinise the officers so that they could work through that in a less formal situation. The suggestion is that as part of our engagement structure, which includes task-and-finish groups, we follow that up with health and safety as a prime objective. That would look at the current position, what the heightened risk tolerance is, what we are doing now, the residents’ involvement with it, the level of skilling that they would wish and, again, communications, which includes communications through all vehicles.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Sorry, to interrupt, but that would be a Lambeth-wide issue.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** How do you choose which residents take part in that, then?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** There is an engagement process. The engagement process through the various forums would be inviting resident representatives to take part in the task-and-finish group.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** It would be a subset of TRA chair type of people?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. You would invite residents who are in TRAs and who are not within TRAs, but in the form of engagement structure so that we could understand the mix --

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Sorry, can you explain? What do you mean by “engagement structure” if they are not in the TRAs? Is there a separate --

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** As with most organisations, we would always seek to make sure that all of our blocks and housing are covered by TRAs. Some are not, especially where we have a lot of street properties



that are not estate-based. We would want to make sure that we are not missing out on any. We are looking at engaging both groups throughout recognised TRAs and perhaps those who are not in TRAs.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes, we have TRAs and they take feedback from their local community about things that they are hearing or seeing in terms of potential areas of concern. Also, we will share our KPIs with them. They would then, for the six months or year ahead, identify areas that they would like to focus on and come back and say, "We want to independently look at this". We facilitate that with our internal audit team, which will support them with training and understanding how to look at that service. Then they will produce a report of things that they see work well, things that they would like improved or things around communication. If we believe that we are telling the message well but it does not come across as resident-friendly, they help us with the tone of the letters. With the fire works that we will be doing, where we need access, there were quality checks on those letters around how it comes across and whether we are getting our point across in a way which is the most effective. Their work programme is generated by data they capture and they come to us and say, "This is what we want to do for the next six months".

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** It is a bit like a scrutiny committee, like us, essentially?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you. Andy, how does that work with you? Your tenants are more engaged in the management generally. Do you have work groups or task-and-finish groups on particular issues that you put together?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Accepting the debate about whether Kensington & Chelsea is now more a TMO, what it has really done is to bring home the issue of legal liability to both our resident directors and also the management team as well. This has been a big and recurrent issue of debate in our Board meetings. Our Resident Directors are very well informed about the whole discussion.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Sorry, what is a 'Resident Director'?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** The way that the JMB is organised is that we have five tenants' associations and people from each of the tenants' associations elect two directors. It is the Board of Directors that makes the strategic decisions about the way that we operate.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Five groups of residents and each elects two and they are the Board, yes?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes, they are the Board. This is a huge issue for us and it means that we have tenant representatives advocating the importance of fire safety.

There is quite a good case study on one of our blocks where we got into an enormously contentious argument about how many pot plants people could have. The approach that we took was that we involved the Southwark Fire Officer and we defined our managed approach about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. It was the tenants who had been involved in the process who went out and advocated the agreement that we had made. Our enforcement on that block has been stronger than on any of our other blocks because residents were so engaged in it. Having succeeded in one place it is an approach that we are looking to roll out on our other blocks as well.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We are now on to the general governance and things, yes.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Your Board of Directors is the liable body, the one that is responsible?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It is an interesting debate about whether it is Southwark Council or me or our directors. Hopefully, it is one that we are never going to have to have in real life. The approach that we have taken is that we work very closely with Southwark Council. However, yes, there is potential legal liability there, which means that we take the issue very seriously.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** That Board is advised by yourself and other officers as well?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes, absolutely.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** And then a legally constituted --

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** We have covered the basis of my first question, which was what governance models you have in place with regard to tenant involvement. Perhaps, Ms Brown, you have already told us a little, but we need it in context.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We have a tiered system where we have local community groups that feed into formal structures. Those formal structures feed into a group that looks at inspections and so we call that our 'Hydewide' Residents Voice. They go around and do inspections over the year, look at our services and look at improvements.

We have a Hyde Residents Board, which takes the feedback from all the subcommittees that sit underneath them and they have a structure --

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** That inspections group being one of those subcommittees?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes; inspections. They also look at performance. They look at procurement. They work on training. They participate in officer interviews for frontline managers and staff. They are very much a part of our organisation in terms of being about shaping our services.

We have the Hyde 5,000, where we have residents who communicate just online with us, giving us feedback about how we communicate, looking at letters that we send out and giving us a residents' assurance tick on some of the things that we send out to our residents.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Can I just ask, as you alluded to earlier, these are effectively scrutiny bodies. They are consultative bodies --

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** They are consultative bodies. We go out and we get their feedback about our services. We also share our performance with them and they also provide us with feedback about things they are hearing from their local community, or things they are hearing that are not going so well and suggestions about what they would like to put forward. If we are changing our service or

looking at our offer, we will go out to them and share the structure, share the thinking and share the direction. They become advocates, because they will challenge us about what we are doing.

Recently, we had a focus on property managers and the role profile of that was shared with those involved residents. They were very much, "We believe the focus should be this. We want them to be visible. We want them out there. We want to understand what they will be saying to residents." They were all part of the interview and selection process for that cohort of teams.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** The Hyde Residents Board is a body of how many?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** There are ten people who sit on that.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** How are they elected?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** They are elected by the residents themselves. As they come up with formal structures, they go through a voting system where they will vote for the Chair, they will vote for the Vice-Chair and --

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** All residents are entitled to vote in that?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** All residents in the involved structure are entitled to vote. People put themselves forward and, once they are in our engaged structure, then they can vote.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** What is the engagement structure, then, sorry?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We have informal groups, which we work with. Then we have formal groups, which we support in terms of further training and development. We take general feedback from our all informal groups, but once they come into the Hyde structure we then provide them with additional training and additional governance that we will support them with.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Let us move on and get others involved, I will come back if I can. Mr Hayes, with regard to Be First and Barking, what kind of involvement do tenants have in the governance of your properties?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Our body is wholly owned by the Council. We are a development company for the Council, effectively. Tenant involvement is on, for us, the client side, which is the housing department as the Council, which has a conventional TRA structure very much like Su described where you have a TRA and there is a housing forum, for example. We would attend and answer questions on schemes at the housing forum and other bodies like that. We are brought in to answer questions or give advice.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** That process is managed by the Council?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Yes, it is entirely managed by the Council, yes. They summons us to come and talk about a technical issue or whatever.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Do you find that you are attending all of those?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** We send someone to all the standing meetings, yes, so that we are represented. If there is a technical question, it can be answered or, if it is a question about estate regeneration, it can be answered.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Ms Gomer, I know you have been involved since at least the early 1990s in Hillingdon. Perhaps you can give us examples of how tenants are involved in the governance structure in Lambeth.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. The Council has recently reviewed the whole of its governance operating structure and its involvement with residents. The revised structure includes a form of Area Boards where residents are part of Area Boards. The first meetings of these new Area Boards started this month. The Area Boards will consider performance and a whole range of KPIs.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** You are saying a new Board or a new structure is coming?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** A new engagement structure, which includes an area board structure. One of the things that the Area Boards are being asked to do - and it was part of the meetings that are happening this month - is to look at what review areas they want to look at. There would be two levels of reviews with the area boards themselves leading on initial reviews of areas they want to look at and then looking at what formal reviews they want to move into, which includes the recommendations for which task-and-finish groups they would like to recommend.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Su, sorry to interrupt. You said the residents are on these Area Boards. Are they only residents on those Boards or are they also made up of other individuals? Sorry, I was not clear.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** It would be both. It is TRAs and residents --

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Yes, and councillors and independents or --

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. As I said, it is an engagement forum and then the residents in those Area Boards would scrutinise key areas and KPIs and, indeed, would also look at where they want additional scrutiny of the key areas--

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** What happens to that? I know that it is a new structure and so you were not so happy with the old structure?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** There were issues in relation to the existing structure and there was quite a lot of involvement and surveys with residents as to what they wanted for a new structure, what was right with the old structure, what was wrong with the old structure and how we would move forward.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** What would happen, just for an example, on one of these Boards if there was a concern on a Board? I am going to move off fire safety because we covered that. Say there was a concern about - I do not know - rats in a particular estate and the Area Board picked that up. What would

happen to that piece of information? What would happen to that recommendation? Where would it then go and who would hear that?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Officers would be attending those boards as well and there would then be local TRA meetings. If there were actions that were picked up, the officers attending those Boards would then respond to those actions. The point you raised was a housing management action.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** You are relying on the officer who is attending that Board to take that piece of information and then turn that into action?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. It would not be just one officer; it would be a number of officers who were there. The boards would be properly supported in terms of governance, so that there were minutes of Board meetings and there were actions identified.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** I am going to ask this to other people as well, do not worry. The reason we are having this today - if I can go back to what the Chair was saying - is that one of the concerns raised by some residents of Grenfell was they perceived a situation where it was as though their recommendations did not really get anywhere. Other inquiries are going to determine whether or not that was the case. However, certainly from our own personal experience - I have sat on residents' boards in Hillingdon, as you know, and in Hackney - I have experienced a situation where we have officers attending residents' meetings, residents will come up with an issue and officers will say, "Yes, we will deal with that". Then it comes up for the subsequent ten meetings because there does not seem to be an imperative to get that going; hence, we are having this meeting to find out what works.

Perhaps what I should be asking you is whether you consider your tenants 'customers', 'partners' or 'shareholders', what are they?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** They are partners. There has to be a relationship between the providers providing a service and the residents receiving a service because, as mentioned earlier on in this meeting, there has to be working with each other in terms of the services that are delivered.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** I have sat on so many of these boards. When a Board comes to a conclusion, does that then go up somewhere or is it just relying on officers taking action? Is it then on the agenda of some other body?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. Then we have an engagement forum, which also includes member-led forums as well. We also have what is called overview and scrutiny forums and we have a corporate committee forum.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Potentially, if a decision was taken at an Area Board that could then go up to a member-level board or committee or something?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. The point that you had raised earlier on was: if there were actions that were requested at a meeting how can you ensure that they are actually carried out? Some of those actions

may be policy actions and would need a policy interface with members. Other actions would be in terms of the notes of a meeting and ensuring actions are carried out so that there is ongoing scrutiny. They are not just noted by officers who are attending; they are noted by the Council's governance forum as well.

Yes, it is fair to say and I have also been at meetings where we have experienced residents' frustration, "We asked that last meeting and it has not been covered". There may be various reasons for that, but it is ensuring that there will always be a response and an update to questions that are raised at that. It may be that one question has been answered but there is a further iteration of that question that goes towards that.

I completely understand that some residents might feel - and I have seen what the Grenfell residents felt - issues were not responded to. It is partly how you scrutinise, how you ensure that actions are taken from your various area boards, and how that is picked up through governance.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Who are the Area Boards chaired by?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** There is a link between our members, our officers and our residents.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Who chairs them, though?

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Do the members as a whole elect a Chair?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** It could be a resident, it could be a councillor, it could be --

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. The area board function is new and so it is only just bedding down this month. My particular focus is on construction and asset management, so I do not want to say something out of turn in terms of how that is going to bed down.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** All right. Ms Brown, you have scrutiny bodies and those are chaired by who?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Residents or an independent. Officers go. For example, if they have an ongoing issue, they will call me to say, "Chyrel, we would like you to attend this meeting". I do go to regular meetings with those bodies. In terms of our governance structure we have two residents who go to our Board. We have a subcommittee of our board called the Group Housing Services Board and it will put questions to the Group Board if things are still arising or still of concern to it.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** That scrutiny structure allows a particular issue to be escalated to another decision-making board --

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** -- or to a decision-making board because these scrutiny committees are not decision-making, that is correct?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes. They have debate and make recommendations, but if they think there is something that is a global challenge for the organisation they will escalate it up through our structures.

We also have a tracker. If questions on the task-and-finish groups are recommended, we track them through our internal audit teams to make sure those items are closed down. Those are the formal task-and-finish groups, but the officers deal with the enquiries at a more local level.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** All right. To what extent can you ensure that you are getting a cross-section of residents? I have sat on many of these meetings and it is the same faces and a small minority of the estate or whatever it is. A tiny minority will turn up to every meeting.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Only because their issue has not been dealt with.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** It is because their issue has not been dealt with, possibly, or they need to get out of this cold. Whatever the reason is, they turn up. It is the same faces and you do not see the majority. How do you address that issue?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** That is an ongoing challenge for us as an organisation in terms of representation. Residents will come to us more frequently if there is a challenge and, as that challenge is addressed, they wean off in terms of the time and the commitment.

Therefore, we try to make our engagement process formal as well as informal. We have an online platform that people can post questions on or chat between themselves with residents to capture what is going on and take up some of those themes. At the same time the work I do with my teams on the ground, about capturing that information and picking up things that are coming up in the inspections, are where we get the majority of the voice.

I do recognise that if I look at a cross-section of my groups they are not completely representative, but at the same time they offer invaluable insight on the things that they are hearing on the ground. I have to balance what I am hearing.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Mr Bates, your structure sounds a lot more like you have shareholders than customers. Those residents can make decisions, is that correct?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It is very simple. We are small enough to be simple. The Board, collectively, has absolute decision-making power. My job description is to implement its decisions as long as they are legal and within the scope of our contract with Southwark. That is absolutely straightforward. If I did not implement any Board decisions I would be in an awful lot of trouble.

In terms of picking up information from the ground, again, we have the tenants' association structure. If directors at the tenants' association do not think that we are dealing with issues effectively, they can escalate it to the main Board and the main Board would make a decision to make us resolve those problems.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Yours is a pure, almost Greek democracy from Plato's time type of structure.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** That cannot be very democratic because it did not involve any women, did it, Andrew?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Or slaves.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Yes, slaves and so forth; just about anyone, really. Then, Ms Brown, yours is more about ensuring you hear the residents' voices and working to hear the residents' voices. We will give Ms Gomer a free pass because it is a new organisation. However, it is telling that Lambeth has recently reinvented itself, which must mean that they were not happy with what was there before.

What are the techniques that we can employ to get resident involvement? I am no fount of knowledge on this. If I knew, I would probably be doing some really well-paid job in consultancy. How do we get more residents involved in what matters? How do we stop the feeling some residents have that their involvement is possibly futile? I have heard that so many times from residents, even when that is not true.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Our Area Boards are chaired by residents. One point that I would say is that what does sometimes happen is that, regardless of which form of governance you are in, you have residents who then become formal members of boards, whether they are ALMO boards, TMO boards and others. There are some residents who then are on the outside of those and, even though those residents who are on the inside of that governance on area board may have been nominated by other residents, there sometimes becomes a disconnect between residents who are on the boards and who have been perhaps nominated by others and residents who are not on boards. The ongoing communication, the networks and the branch-out with residents has to ensure residents do not feel disconnected just because they may not be sitting on a board. That is an ongoing challenge through all of my years in terms of resident involvement and scrutiny about how you can help that.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Yes. It is not an easy job. It really is not. Ms Brown?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** I would echo that in terms of not taking it for granted that those involved residents are going to spread the word wider than the forum that they are in. You might do a lot of work trying to unpick or resolve a problem raised by that group, but we have to be very clear about how far we disseminate that message and demonstrate that that has been captured because it has been put up through the different structures. It is an ongoing challenge.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Can you give us a concrete example where residents have influenced a change in your organisation?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Through our task-and-finish group, for example, we inspect a number of services. Our task-and-finish group inspected our empty homes and lettings in our voids process. We used to do a lettable standard about what we did on somebody moving into that property and they had made recommendations about that standard in terms of the work we do before somebody moves in. We adapted our standards in accordance with some of the challenges they made, which were rightfully so in terms of what repairs we do upfront and getting people to move in and doing the works retrospectively. We have shaped some of our processes based on that feedback and demonstrated to residents that, because residents said this, this is what we have done.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Presumably, I do not even need to ask you, Mr Bates, about that because that is how your organisation is: everything comes from the tenants?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It is still a challenge for us. We like meetings because people come and debate and they hear other people's points of view, so we still prefer



meetings to surveys. However, again, because we are small, we just bang out as much information as we can through websites and Twitter and Facebook. Then we can connect with our residents' representatives' Facebook pages because they have thousands more friends than we have. We are not so large that we have to be corporate and, if we get our communication a bit wrong, people will live with that. Therefore, we think it is better to communicate than communicate perfectly.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Do you have an example of where a change has taken place directly as a result of --

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes. A challenge for everybody is just providing a reliable repair service. One of the things that came through the tenants' associations and then through the board is that you phone up for any service and you get a receipt number. I said, "That is not terribly useful because somebody could just be writing that down. What we need to give you is the job number to prove that it has been ordered and we need to tell you when the job is going to be completed", and so, interestingly, we always offer that. Probably only about 25% of people take it up. Lots of people say, "Yes, that is fine", but in 25% of cases it means that people have confirmation that the job is on the system and they know when it should be done.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** That is interesting because one of my questions that I had almost forgotten to ask was whether your residents sign off jobs.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** We do two things. One is that we send them satisfaction slips and two is that we do about a 10% sample of calls and phone people up. Again, because we are small, if things go wrong, people are very quick to tell us if it has gone wrong.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Ms Brown?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We do satisfaction surveys across our jobs. We do a percentage each month and we go in and get all the feedback. We look into trends, which we take up with our contractors on a monthly basis.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Residents themselves do not directly sign off?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** They do not sign off. We post-inspect a sample of jobs in terms of what the contractors do. We also work with the information we get from resident surveys.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Many of us will have experienced situations like I had when I was a councillor in Hackney of a resident coming to me and saying, "They have signed off this job and they have painted over the windows while they were closed". That was signed off by the manager and the resident was not involved in any of it. You survey?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** We survey and we sample from the surveys as well.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Would it be a huge administrative issue for residents to be involved in the signoff process?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** I do not think so because you just send a satisfaction slip and ask them to --

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** And wait until you get a response?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes, but be proactive and phone people up as well, and also do your own post-inspections.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Our telephone calls are independent. The surveying team does call them up and say, "How was that job? What was the contractor like?"

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Specifically, down to a specific job, rather than generally, "Are you happy with this"?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Specifically, to a job, yes. We do repair satisfaction as well as overall satisfaction.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We have a similar approach to the point that Chyrel has mentioned. Back to the question that you asked in relation to what has changed, the task-and-finish group was looking at major works and leasehold billing. One of the points it picked up was that we deliver our services under a long-term qualifying agreement whereby the qualifying agreements and the contracts were set up some years ago and then you pull down when you need to do the works. It was noted that technical works were not re-procured when we re-procured major works because they were part of an earlier contract procurement. Then, for 2014/15, we agreed that we would go out to the market again for our technical contracts for that year. We did. We checked the market.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Did that issue come from residents?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** It did come from residents. It came from residents as part of the in-depth level of the scrutiny that we were undertaking. It was leaseholders who raised that point, but it was a joint tenant-and-leaseholder forum. There are other actions arising from that task-and-finish group, which were reviewed and were clearly what residents wanted. Therefore, we followed them through, but that was one example.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** I expected quite a lot of supplementary questions on this issue because we have asked you all about your governance arrangements. I have Assembly Member Copley and then I have Assembly Member Devenish.

**Tom Copley AM:** What sparked it in my mind was what was mentioned about a potential divide between residents and residents who are on governing bodies. One thing that has been said to me before is that just putting a tenant or two on a board is not the most effective way of doing it, in part because they then become, essentially, a director or trustee. Their duty is to the organisation and not necessarily to the tenants, and they have a fiduciary duty and all of that.

Would you agree? Is it the view of the panel that that is the case and that there are other ways that are more effective of involving tenants, for example, through the forums that have been mentioned and things like that?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** It has to be a mixture. It has to be like an involvement web so that you are picking up not just, if you like, the people in the know but the people who are not in the know. You consistently go to meetings and think, "We have gone through this", but then other residents will say, "We did not know because we did not come to that group". It has to be a web.

You have to use all vehicles of liaison and information - colleagues have mentioned Twitter and Facebook - and how people want to liaise. Our leaseholders have found it very efficient recently to ensure that they have a specific Facebook and Twitter response just for them so that they can immediately get information around to each other. If they go to a forum and somebody says something, it is immediately around to the rest of the group.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** I completely agree. It is having that 360 in terms of when they run the boards, how we also support the message going back down to the local groups. Just leaving it to those residents alone to advocate the message or to share the message is not enough as an organisation. We still have a responsibility look at what the groups are saying locally ourselves and to get involved in those groups, even as a touchpoint, rather than just accepting what is coming up through.

**Tom Copley AM:** Yours is a slightly different view, Andy, is it not? Are all your directors residents? Is that the way?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It is ten elected directors and then we have three co-optees. It is an issue because, as you said, people suddenly have legal duties and people have bureaucratic duties. Also, people operate across a number of estates. Part of it is that people keep the energy of a tenant activist and they do effectively raise issues, but also act as representatives of the organisation as well.

**Tom Copley AM:** Thank you.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Andy talked earlier about how issues had fallen away, I quote, after Grenfell. In terms of engagement, have you seen an upturn in engagement - in terms of not the same two or three residents - since Grenfell in terms of the community? Have the numbers gone up from dozens to hundreds or - dare I even say it - from hundreds to thousands? Is it the same few characters engaging or is it wider engagement broadly across social media, meetings, etc, post-Grenfell?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** It would be lovely if I could tell you that lots more people got involved. We did have a meeting with the Southwark fire expert that was pretty well attended.

**Tony Devenish AM:** How many people is "pretty well attended"?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Fifteen people. Our experience is that through our existing structures, fire safety has become the main issue. Certainly, people in our tower blocks expected us to get out and talk to them individually very quickly after the Grenfell fire.

**Tony Devenish AM:** The other thing I wanted to ask about, which I have had recently for a completely different issue of Tube noise, is residents in one part of London being very good at feeding into the process than another part of London. Have you heard anything from people in Camden or - dare I say it - in North

Kensington feeding in to you and saying, "Make sure you look at this"? Is there any specific feedback that has been helpful in terms of fire doors, whitegoods, appliances or whatever?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes. It is an issue for the London Tenants Federation, which has a network of tenants' organisations across London. It has been collating information and also had a conference where there was workshop on it. They are really under-resourced and it would be much better if there was more money around for residents to get about and share experiences. Given the general climate of under-resourcing, certainly the London Tenants Federation has co-ordinated activity on this.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Great. Thank you.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** When I was the chair of an area housing association, we had regular walkabouts, which were announced to the tenants, with relevant officers and ward council members to go and look at the estates. There was progress reporting and so we would go back to find out what had been done. It was not just external, but tenants could call us in to look at whether the damp had been looked at or the locks changed or whatever. There were member forums and so on, but I had the feeling that there is no substitute for being onsite. It is not just the reporting; it is the progress chasing. Is that done regularly with any of you?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** We have regular what we call 'Wednesday walkabouts' every Wednesday. We have over 100 estates and they are scheduled. Every Wednesday there is a walkabout onsite looking at different issues in relation to the estate and knocking on doors. Officers there will be knocking on doors of residents, seeing who is in and what issues are pertinent to people, so that we are picking that up. As well as inspecting and officers going out with contractors, we are also knocking on doors. It might be that residents' representatives are with us on the inspection, but we want to understand what the wider group of residents are saying so that we do pick that up.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** You go back to those estates?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** It is going back and seeing. It is the follow-up that is the crucial bit.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Yes. A number of things would be seen specifically, like the external environment, cleanliness, caretaking issues, what the communal areas look like, residents' concerns in terms of facilities for children and what the playgrounds are looking like. It is that sort of thing. All of those actions are followed up by the resident estate manager, who takes particular responsibility for that particular estate. It is knocking on doors of residents - and it is not just estate managers, I have been on those and others are going on those - just to see what residents are feeling like at the time in terms of issues that are occurring.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** My feeling is that the types of organisations delivering social housing have been changing with, in particular, a lot of merging and growth. We now have organisations like the Clarion Housing Group all over East Anglia, London and the southeast; A2Dominion from - I do not know - Southend, I think, definitely all the way down to Bristol; and London and Quadrant have a huge number of units in management. It would be fair to say that over the years housing management and the interface with the tenants, leaseholders and residents has always been the 'Cinderella service'; and I say that in front of Pat and obviously

his organisation is mainly focused around all the exciting things to do with regeneration and development. Do you think, in that context, the huge growth of some of these organisations - much more geographically spread than just being in one London borough - has had an impact on the ability to really truly involve residents in the decisions that are being made?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** I work for an organisation and I manage from East Anglia down to Southampton. The challenge is around how residents connect with the organisation and believe that their voices are heard and recognised. In terms of our governance structures and resident involvement, we have been on a journey of evolution to make sure we capture the local groups and put them through a structure in which they can see how they are recognised. However, we understand the challenges about local issues and how somebody's challenge in Southampton may not be recognised by somebody as a challenge in Lambeth. How do we cater for that?

We have gone through a process of informal local meetings with property managers out there with the local teams, as well as having a more global digital service where we offer an online Moodle where residents can talk to each other from all over the country. What you will see is common issues about what residents are saying and how they are communicating.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Give us an example.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** An example is around the visibility of what we do and when we do it and, if a decision is made about changing a service, their connectivity to it, "How can I get involved? When did I know? If you are going to close that reception or open that reception, why?" It is around being able to share with residents what that looks like. We have a customer service centre and people challenged, "Why is that in London?", or, "Why is that in Chichester? Why can it not be in Peterborough?" It is about being very transparent about the service offer available and sometimes being clear about the why notes. Sometimes the challenge for residents is when you do not say and they leap to their own conclusions rather than being completely transparent with the whys and the why notes.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** When those changes in the organisation are taking place - you have just given some really good examples of the front-facing interface with residents - there are also more structural changes as well. I do not know whether for all of the tenants of the Clarion Housing Group - I don't know, a massive poll was conducted to say, "We are going to take on" - I do not know - "Merton Priory Homes or Tower Hamlets Homes and we are going to bring it in and we are going to expand to this very large organisation". Should residents be involved in making those more strategic decisions? I can see a nod from next to you immediately, but it is a bit easier for you, Andy [Bates], actually, to be fair.

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes. In Hyde and in other organisations I have worked with, when we have gone through mergers, we have used our formal residents' governance structure to engage with residents. When we were looking to merge with an organisation we got the formalised groups together in a room and said, "This is what it is going to be. What would you like in terms of a new governance model in terms of resident engagement as we move forward?" We were taking the best of each organisation and seeing what we came up with. Now some residents in the different organisations are structured in different ways and the politics of the groups also have to be harmonised in terms of what bits you take and what bits you do not take. However, I think that it is critical for all organisations that --

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Do you mean like how federated you are?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** How federated you are. For example, I do independent scrutiny with another organisation and they have a tension between the out-of-London group and the inner-London group about who gets most visibility from the organisation based on how they have developed over the years. As an organisation you have to be mindful that you are not favouring one particular method over another, at the same time understanding what things you are really wanting to hear from your residents and how you are showing strategically that your policies and procedures are being shaped by the voices of those residents.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** We have touched on the thorny issue of the setting up of the ALMOs and balloting with tenants to say whether or not they wanted to be outsourced in that way. That is why the Kensington and Chelsea TMO is fundamentally different because it took place at a different time. The ALMOs always included from the beginning of that - those that were set up at that period of 2002, 2003, 2004 - they were going to take on these big tasks, doing a lot of major renewal work to buildings and blocks, and not just day-to-day management, maintenance and lettings. How involved, if there is a big structural change like that going on, should residents be in that decision? Let us say Southwark decided it was going to do something completely different with its stock. Should all of the residents be balloted with a big information exercise --

**Tom Copley AM:** That was my question.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Sorry. Am I going into your question?

**Tom Copley AM:** You are going into my question there.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We will have further questions on regeneration coming up, Assembly Member Cooper. Is it mergers you are talking about primarily?

**Leonie Cooper AM:** No, I am not talking about regeneration necessarily; I am just talking about the actual management here. It seems to me that that was one of the problems that happened with the Kensington and Chelsea TMO, that they did do some of those changes to take on doing these larger structural improvements. I do not know whether at the same time they became more focused on the regeneration and development side and perhaps that then obscured the ability to continue the engagement with the residents. I just put that out there.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** There is a real issue here in terms of that. The traditional public-sector view has been to very much focus on governance and involvement of people in governance and possibly lose sight of the service delivery. The traditional council housing department many years ago delivered a fairly poor service but tenants were fairly involved with it. There needs to be a much greater focus on standards and delivery of really high-standard housing management, at which point people tend to be less worried about whether they are involved in the decision-making because everything is being done properly. One of the big learning points for both the Registered Social Landlord sector and for housing departments is improving service quality and getting to what is genuinely best in the market.

I do have concerns in terms of the scale of some of these new mega housing associations. Who will do smaller-scale development, for example, on small sites because they become, effectively, large-scale development organisations? At some time, we will probably have to reinvent the small developing housing association that works at a community level, building ten homes here, five homes there, etc.

There are also real issues in terms of how an organisation of that scale can do development effectively as, in all but name, a very large-scale private developer and at the same time be managing an enormous portfolio of stock. There is a real issue there for everybody, particularly if mergers continue because you can see us being down to two major housing associations in London at the rate we are at the moment. They will fight each other on Waterloo Bridge as to who is the last one standing.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Do you think it is going to be called 'Hyde and Q'?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes, or 'Family and Q' or something, yes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We are running out of time. Sorry. We are enjoying ourselves discussing the wider issues, but our investigation is going to look into this more widely.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** No, that is really important, the balance between the development in the regeneration and retrofit and also how to keep that focus on the day-to-day, nitty-gritty stuff that is so important for the residents. Thank you.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Sorry to interrupt but we have one more section to go. Assembly Member Boff wants to ask a question?

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** Just very quickly on this, because of course we are talking about this change to residents' involvement, what was it that happened in Lambeth that made you want to change the residents' involvement? Did you rather dramatically sack a few residents from the board or something like that?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** The residents' involvement structure had been in place for some time. Soundings were being taken from residents via surveys as to how involved they were in structures and how involved they were in engagement. It was felt that you could move to a new form of resident engagement, which includes the Area Boards, and test that to see if it was bringing in a wider form of involvement through different residence groups.

**Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair):** How did you persuade residents that it was not a situation where the Council did not like what the residents were saying and so got rid of those residents and got some other ones on?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** You would never change residents' perceptions. Residents may have that perception and you would not challenge that. What you would want to say is move to a different form of engagement that is meant to be more inclusive and see how that is working through the first year.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** I have one final question for you. You are not unique in Lambeth at setting up a housing company to do some of the regenerations and things like that. As I understand it, there are quite a lot of infill projects going on in Lambeth. Is it going to result in maybe there being an estate that is mainly Council-managed with a block within it that is instead managed by the separate company? How does that work? Will that cause problems for resident engagement if there are different residents with different statuses?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Unfortunately, Sue Foster [OBE, Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods and Growth, London Borough of Lambeth] was going to cover an amount of the regeneration issues, I know she said she would follow up.

What I would do, though, is draw from previous experiences in other boroughs. Where we had an estate that has had residents who are from housing associations or councils or TMOs what we tried to move towards was common management standards. Regardless of whether the landlord was different, residents on that estate would have a certain form of common management standards. That is drawing from previous experience.

However, as I said, Sue did say she would follow up in terms of questions on regeneration and the points you have raised. I will make sure she does.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Yes, that will be really useful, especially if the Area Boards are there --

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** Of course.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** -- to provide some sort of common forum between different people. Yes, some more detail would be useful and maybe some diagrams.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** I will do that, yes.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you. Moving on to the final section of our meeting, this is about the work of the Mayor, who has been getting involved in this lately. Assembly Member Copley?

**Tom Copley AM:** Indeed. Thank you very much, Chair. First of all, to Andy, getting on to the subject of estate regeneration, what is your approach at Leathermarket to resident involvement and engagement in this type of estate regeneration?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** There are two parts. One is major works. As I said in my introduction, delivering high-quality major works is a real challenge. One of the things we found is that we could deliver a £1 million contract, but if somebody would not like a particular element of it like the floor covering -- So, what we do is publicise the specification very early and we try to involve people in talking about the detail of the specification. We keep residents involved right the way through, including interviewing contractors because that reinforces in the contractors' minds that we are a resident-managed organisation and that quality is really important to us. Then there is also the feedback whilst the contract is underway and then the formal involvement of residents at the end of the contract.

In terms of development, we have set up a separate organisation called the Leathermarket Community Benefit Society. The role is to build homes at council rent. Our approach has very much been infill and so to look for areas of estates that are underused. I know this is contentious, but my take is that a number of estates in the 1950s were built to fairly generous external standards, some of the areas are not particularly needed and so they offer opportunities for new build. Again, as a community-based organisation we are very well placed to consult on that because we have the existing consultation structures in place, but we have gone for [the approach] to start with a genuinely blank piece of paper and then we will work up from there.



Our experience is that we are now building 27 homes on a difficult site. We got the site because it was too difficult for Southwark Council to build on. Due to the quality of our consultation we had no formal objections at the planning stage, which just flabbergasted the Southwark planning officers.

**Tom Copley AM:** When you say “quality of our consultation”, what sorts of things are you doing? If you were to say to other organisations that are doing infill how to do it so that you end up in a situation where nobody objects?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** I would say do not start from zero. You need trust and you need existing structures. Too often regeneration feels dropped in. It is a new set of people. There is no organic connection and it gets off to a really bad start. We were lucky because people trusted us to do the repairs, people trusted us to do the major works, people trusted that we clean the estate, and that flowed through to infill.

Then, as I say, start the consultation off with a blank piece of paper. Be prepared for two people at the back who will just stand and shout. You then need to keep the consultation going in a genuine way. Listen to people’s concerns, address people’s concerns and feedback on people’s concerns.

The other thing is that, if you are talking about building on an estate, you will naturally have a couple of people who will be very much against it. What we did was a really comprehensive housing needs strategy. We got out and spoke to about half of our tenants. Against the argument that, “Can you not just leave that alone? It is going to be noisy. It is going to be disruptive”, we had the information about the number of people who were going to be rehoused. A local allocations element is absolutely essential to this.

**Tom Copley AM:** Does Southwark do your allocations, or do you?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Southwark on its own new builds has agreed a 50% local allocation element. If an estate is taking an infill scheme, it is 50% local allocations. They applied that to us. We worked the deal slightly differently in that there were three developments going on and we did not take any allocation rights on Southwark’s development, which meant that we could have 100% on our own development. That meant that we could identify the people going in there very early because it was principally people whom we had attempted to downsize with the offer of new-build accommodation that would suit their needs as they grew older.

Again, we were lucky that we had the counterweight of people saying, “No, you should not be building on housing estates” but we had other people who were saying, “Look, I desperately need to be rehoused”.

**Tom Copley AM:** I see. I am sorry, I do not quite what stage you are at, but are you getting a lot of uptake for downsizing? This is another area we are quite interested in.

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes. We are building 27 units at the moment and it is principally people who are downsizing who are moving into that. They are people who would not have downsized under the Council’s allocation system.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** From family housing?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** From family housing.

**Nicky Gavron AM:** You can then fill the family housing?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** Yes, precisely.

**Tom Copley AM:** Your approach is not one that involves demolition, I believe. Is that right?

**Andy Bates (Joint Management Board Manager, Leathermarket JMB):** That is right.

**Tom Copley AM:** I am interested maybe in hearing from one of the councils or from Hyde. If you are doing schemes that involve demolition, how do you involve residents in that?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** At Hyde we had the big regeneration that we did at Packington, where we had a big knockdown-and-replacement programme. The lessons from that were very much about the authenticity of the conversation and not starting off with a predetermined outcome when you are speaking to the residents. Throughout that programme we consistently had the same members of staff who were working with those residents, and followed through on the actions and the things that were suggested in terms of maintaining the service offer.

Also, the relationship with the contractor - showing that we were all accountable for what they were doing and the offer made to residents - was also very much part of our offer to the residents. The residents generally have seen that we were making changes based on their challenges or suggestions. It was not as though they were on the forum with us and we railroaded them because we, as the contractor, or we, as the housing association, were the experts. We offered training to get them up to speed with what the decision-making was. Now those residents are the advocates and are involved in other formal structures in the business because of the work that we did with them. We have turned some very sceptical residents into believing in terms of what we are able to achieve with the ability to push and challenge.

**Tom Copley AM:** Was there a ballot because it was a stock transfer?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Yes, there was.

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** The main thing is actually painstaking door-knocking and talking to people, identifying not collective issues but individual issues in terms of what people want out of the process. If they want to move somewhere else, then identify that, help them do that and be able to deliver for them as well. It is on that level of painstaking door-knocking. It is also about keeping people informed about the process, doing it through face-to-face contact and also social media and things that get to younger people, people who are working and people who have lots of other obligations. If you try to do it through formal structures you never get there. That is a huge lesson.

It is also about the offer that you have and the involvement in the early stages. You need to get buy-in around the design and you need to get buy-in in terms of the programme. Also, the Mayor is absolutely right - and it is a point he has picked up - you have to be re-providing the social housing in an equivalent format. You have to enable everybody who wants to stay there to stay if they want to. It is part of the discussion. If they want to go somewhere else - whether it is out of London, another part of London or somewhere else in the borough - then that should be enabled.

You have to provide a decent offer for leaseholders, particularly for those leaseholders who are genuinely occupier leaseholders in terms of either an alternative property, a cash sum or a shared ownership property on the estate. There are often issues around the equity value that they have.

It is about practical solutions for all those sorts of things. Then people tend to go with the scheme because the scheme is thought out and they are treated in a way that they are treated in any other transaction with an organisation. That is the big thing: this is their home, but it is a transaction and you have to treat people in the appropriate way, making sure that their needs are met and that they are looked after.

**Tom Copley AM:** What about the issue of ballots for residents whose homes are facing demolition? The Mayor is now proposing them for the schemes that he funds. Do you think they are a good idea?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** I do not know whether they are. Certainly, my experience in Ealing was that we pushed a very large number of schemes through. We never balloted on them but there was almost overwhelming resident support for those schemes because the principles were there. The actual resident dissatisfaction was around delay, "Are you getting on with it? Can you move faster? Can our element be the next phase rather than the last phase?"

The issue with ballots is making sure that the information is there at the start. We all know from experience that a binary ballot is not necessarily a great thing. Perhaps use a more sophisticated form of ballot, whether you do it on a block-by-block basis or whether you do it on a much wider area. Also, how you deal with issues around absentee leaseholders, for example, who will always vote against any change because there will be a cost on them and the potential void of their property, etc. Ballots are clearly going to be there, but it is making sure that we do not just get into a binary ballot situation all the time. There is possibly greater sophistication around that ballot in terms of both the question that is asked and the context of who takes part. We have to look after the interests of people who are currently on the housing waiting list and are not looking for housing yet but we will do soon, people who might have to downsize to a particular form of accommodation, etc.

**Tom Copley AM:** Did you put in a response to the Mayor's consultation on --

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** We have not done yet.

**Tom Copley AM:** Did you put one in to the previous one on the estate regeneration and make those points, I assume?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Yes.

**Tom Copley AM:** Su, could I come to you with the same question on resident engagement and also the question of whether or not ballots are a good idea when demolition is involved, as the Mayor was saying?

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** As I said, Sue Foster [OBE, Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods and Growth, London Borough of Lambeth] was going to cover that area.

**Tom Copley AM:** All right. If you do not want to --

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** There were a number of key points that I know she wanted to make. Up until last night she was coming and so we have not had a proper debrief for me to be able to respond.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Perhaps she could write to the Chair.

**Tom Copley AM:** Yes, I am sure she could.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** She has offered to do that.

**Tom Copley AM:** We are slightly short of time now anyway, but I am sure she could write to us.

**Su Gomer (Assistant Director, Housing Capital & Asset Management, Strategic Programmes, London Borough of Lambeth):** She has offered to do that, yes.

**Tom Copley AM:** I was just going back very quickly to Hyde. I know we had talked about the ballot for Packington, but do you think in principle they are a good idea? Do you agree with the Mayor's approach that he has set out?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Just as Pat said, there has to be nuance in the ballot in terms of making sure that it covers different aspects and you are not just getting a slanted view from a binary yes or no. Having worked previously in another organisation on a stock transfer where it was a binary yes or no, when we looked into the people who had said no, there were legitimate reasons but it was ring fenced around a particular issue, not necessarily for the wider regeneration of that area. It was picked up that leaseholders, for example, were concerned about the cost of the works, what they were going to be charged and how they were going to repay. You have to have nuances to your offer in the first instance and buy-in and shaping up your offer, rather than saying that a ballot is your thing to get buy-in for the scheme. I would say thinking about your offer block by block and how you present that to the different clientele in that scheme, and so just some intelligence, I would say.

**Tom Copley AM:** The reputation of regeneration is not a particularly high one at the moment. Do you think that ballots would help to, first of all, because not all organisations or councils are, let us say, as good as others at engaging with tenants? Would you think that, first of all, it would necessitate them doing that? Secondly, do you think it confers legitimacy on the scheme?

**Chyrel Brown (Director of Resident Services, Hyde Group):** Having more lessons learnt around engagement, being more widely accepted or debated about what the offer should be and how you work to get that position has to be shared because, without that - as Pat [Hayes] said - the door-knocking, the intelligence and the understanding of what your residents want, no matter how you present it, if it does not suit the residents in that community, they are going to say no, even if on paper it looks like a masterplan that is going to transform their world. As my colleague said, it is a partnership. As a stakeholder they have to feel that there is benefit as well as compromises which they truly accept rather than being forced to accept.

**Tom Copley AM:** I will leave it there because of time.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** I am looking through the list of respondents to the previous consultation on the draft estate regeneration guidance, which covered a lot, but it did not cover ballots. It did not even ask a question about ballots, but it also has a lot of questions about the Mayor's proposals. I can see that Leathermarket responded, Hyde Group responded, and Lambeth Council responded. Pat, you have recently moved out of Ealing, which did respond. It looks like Barking and Dagenham did not. Can you possibly look into that and find out? Can we have your responses to the Mayor's consultation, where they exist?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** My response would probably be the same as the Ealing response now.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Can you send us the Ealing response?

**Pat Hayes (Managing Director, Be First Regeneration Limited):** Yes, I will try to.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** That would be useful to see.

**Tom Copley AM:** They should all be in the appendices. They are all published, actually, all the responses.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** The actual responses?

**Tom Copley AM:** I think so. They are all public, I am pretty sure they are.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** We will look into that offline. I have been chasing that up. Maybe they are now. We are running out of time. We have further questions about the proposal of having a Social Housing Commissioner, but I propose to the Committee that we may have run out of time for that today and we will follow up. We are going to look into this issue more.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** In any case, Chair, we were planning to put those to Sue Foster primarily, who is not here.

**Leonie Cooper AM:** Perhaps she could include that in the letter

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Exactly, and so we can look further because the Government is planning a Green Paper. The Mayor and others are saying there should be a Social Housing Commissioner and those are issues where some of these things might be taken up. We cannot discuss that anymore today. Can I just say thank you to our guests for your contributions and for staying a bit late? We have a couple more formal items on our agenda we need to just discuss, but you can stay if you want or you can pack up and leave.

**Tom Copley AM:** Thank you. Very interesting.

**Sian Berry AM (Chair):** Thank you.