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Deane Greenouff,
Executive Director,
Housing & Asset Management,
Civica Election Services

(Sent via email)

25 November 2021

Dear Deane,

Conduct of estate ballot on demolition of Carpenters Estate, Newham

I recently met with residents of the Carpenters Estate, Newham, who raised concerns with me over tactics used by Newham Council and Populo Living (Newham council's housing company) regarding unfair practices around the ballot, including the following:

1. Excessive publicity on the estate

Residents have shown me pictures of information boards sited on the end of every street where eligible voters live about the masterplan for the demolition and rebuild. Around a third of the content on these boards promotes 'Vote Yes' with five numbered reasons for doing so, plus another five supporting points. Further, the Dovetail community space on the estate, funded by Populo Living, has a 'Vote Yes' poster in its window. This means that everywhere residents move around the estate they are confronted by advertising urging them to vote in favour of demolition. There is no equal public space given over to 'Vote No' material. In a democratic local election these kinds of publicity material would not be permitted.

2. Biased material

The Landlord Offer should be an objective statement of the nature of the proposals. Instead, the Landlord Offer document I have seen features three adverts saying 'Vote Yes' within the 26-page document. In addition, tenants were sent a letter from the Mayor of Newham and Chief Executive entitled: "A personal note from Rokhsana and Althea" just two days before the ballot started, which contains the phrase: "*The outcome of the ballot brings us closer to starting the much needed restoration and regeneration of the Carpenters Estate, which will begin early next year if you give it*



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the green light through voting 'YES' in the ballot!" On top of this, the Populo Living-produced October newsletter 'The Carpenters' gives three of its four pages over to the estate ballot, with one page specifically promoting the yes vote.

3. Pressure tactics

Residents also tell me about a: *"fun-day which took place on Sat 30 October 2021, the day after the ballot should have begun. This included giving residents free chips, ice cream, flowers, a line dancing group and a clown performed, and much else. They did not admit this was to coincide with the ballot starting to promote a yes vote, but it quite clearly was. The Mayor came down that day to encourage residents to vote yes."*

4. Paid canvassing

More overt pressure has been put on residents by employees of Populo Living who have been door knocking them with a script that is heavily biased towards the yes vote. It contains such phrases as: *"If most residents vote 'YES' we are ready to start building a new future for the estate for generations to come, all we need is the green light from you."*

There is no possibility that any community group on the estate calling for a no vote would be able to produce a similar amount of publicity or engagement with residents to ensure a fair and balanced campaign for the ballot.

If this were a political election, the way this estate ballot is being conducted would be considered to have breached a range of electoral offences, including treating and paid canvassing.

Please can you reply to me with details of whether and how you consider this ballot:

- a) Complies with the [GLA Resident Ballot Compliance Checklist](#);
- b) Can be considered a free and fair choice by the residents?

I have raised problems over unfair publicity and pressure from landlords during previous estate ballots in London with the Mayor and his team.^{1,2} We worked hard to win a policy that gives residents a clear say in the future of their homes, but this means nothing if ballots are not run properly and if they leave residents feeling that their voice has not been fairly counted.

As the UK's leading provider of election services, I think it is time to examine the conduct of estate ballots over and above the limited checklist that the GLA has set up. I am happy to share with you the material outlined above if it will help you look into this. I hope you will give this suggestion due consideration and come back to me with your thoughts.

¹ Estate ballots: are they working? <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/estate-ballots-are-they-working?blocktitle=news-features>

² Question to the Mayor: Estate Ballot Review Process, 14 October 2021, <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2021/4089>



I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Sian Berry
Green Party Member of the London Assembly

cc Simon Clarke, Commercial & Relationship Manager



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