

<b>Item No.</b> 11.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 14 September 2021	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Putting Residents First Standards Review	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All wards	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Council Homes and Homelessness	

## **FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR STEPHANIE CRYAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR COUNCIL HOMES AND HOMELESSNESS**

This report sets out our commitment to work with our tenants and residents to get major works to their homes right and details the standards residents should expect from the Council for all of our major works projects. It details the approach we will take, including asking residents their view on what work is needed before we develop a specification, setting up a Resident Project Team so we can work closely with people from each estate, consulting all tenants and homeowners on the full scope of work to their homes, and involving residents throughout the works to make sure they are done to a high standard.

The new Putting Residents First principles will include a refresh and update on the standards that underpin resident engagement and involvement on major works projects, enhanced Standards developed with a dedicated resident volunteer group and a commitment to providing more avenues for resident engagement to capture key local knowledge in decision making about the design and delivery of major works.

Alongside more traditional forms of consultation, residents will be able to access online meetings and improved information and updates about their major works scheme in different ways. I believe that enhanced resident involvement will ensure that the right scope of works is designed, delivered and communicated to the highest standards, ensuring that we will always put our residents first.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation for the Cabinet**

#### **That Cabinet approves:**

1. The reviewed operational process: *Putting Residents First Standards* as set out in Appendix 1.

## **Recommendation for the Leader of the Council**

2. That the Leader of the Council delegates authority to the cabinet member for council homes and homelessness to approve the reviewed operational process, Putting Residents First Standards as set out in Appendix 1.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3. The Putting Residents First (PRF) standards were introduced in 2012 as part of the Council Local Offers and approved by the Tenant Council and Homeowners Council. Prior to this date, the Council did not have any formal criteria for consulting residents during major works.
4. The standards were developed by a working party chaired by Councillor Ian Wingfield, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Communities. Residents were consulted during the development of the standards.
5. The PRF standards were last reviewed in 2015. The standards were presented to Cllr Richard Livingstone, Cabinet Member for Housing at the time, in March 2015.
6. The Strategic Director of Housing and Modernisation, Michael Scorer, recommended the creation of a Homeowners task and finish group which was set up at the beginning of 2019 to examine a number of major works-related communication and consultation issues, following a number of concerns raised by residents during the London Borough of Southwark's Homeowner Council autumn conference in 2018.
7. The Homeowners task and finish group met three times between June 2019 and January 2020. The findings and conclusions of the task and finish group are included in Appendix #2.
8. A report went to Cabinet on 7 April 2020, confirming that the review of the PRF standards would take place and Cabinet agreed to delegate the timing of this review to the lead Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Modernisation.
9. The original report was scheduled to go back to Cabinet in October 2020 but due to the delays in the setting up the Local Housing Forums, it was agreed that the final report would be delayed to 2021 and approval delegated to the lead Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Modernisation, Cllr Pollak.
10. Following this report a full review of the PRF standards including both tenants and homeowners was undertaken.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **The Review Process - Why it was decided to review the current standards**

11. It was decided that it was an appropriate time to review the current standards, for a number of reasons:
  - a) The standards had not been reviewed since 2015
  - b) To ensure the standards are robust to support the Great Estates Council plan
  - c) To address the findings of the Homeowners task and finish group.

### **The process**

12. In March 2020 an Officer Team was set up between the Investment Delivery team and the Programme Team. The Tenant and Homeowner Involvement team, Service Charge Construction team and MySouthwark Homeowners Service supported the review.
13. During the first 5 Local Housing Forums in July 2020, the team asked for volunteers from each housing area to become part of a review group to help with the review and improvement of the current PRF standards.
14. In total, 14 residents volunteered from the Housing Forums, 7 of whom were tenants and 7 were homeowners.
15. The review group met during 3 evening meetings that were organised at dates and times convenient for the volunteers, between October 2020 and January 2021.
16. During the meetings it was endeavoured to have a balance with residents between an adequate amount of time to discuss the issues, while still ensuring the review process was efficient and progressed without unnecessary delay.
17. These discussions produced a number of recommendations which were logged in an action log to help implementation.
18. At the first meeting the reasons why the standards were being reviewed were explained to the residents in the review group and a timetable was agreed with the group as to when the new standards would be prepared.

## **How were the findings and conclusions of the Homeowners task and finish group embedded within the review**

19. The findings and conclusions of the Homeowners task and finish group were presented to the review group at the first meeting and a number of ideas which could aid and resolve the concerns raised by the task and finish group, as well as improving the communication and consultation tools used during major works, were discussed.

### **Interests**

20. A document was presented to the group members in order to help them have a better understanding of the current standards and who is involved at each stage, with the view to introduce such a document as an appendix to the new standards.
21. The idea behind this document is to enable all residents to have a clearer and better understanding of who is involved at each stage of the standards and create more transparency between the Council and Southwark's residents during major works projects.
22. The document was received positively and members of the review group recommended that an organisation chart and complaint procedures with clear timeframes should be included within the document.
23. Both recommendations were considered by the project team and included in the new draft of the standards which was presented to the review group during the second and third meetings. This can be found within Appendix 3 & 4 of the proposed new standards.

### **Confidence**

24. Another concept which was presented during the meetings was to introduce a Commonplace information and consultation online platform for major works projects where residents could find important information about individual projects, such as event times and dates, feasibility reports, surveys and contact details of the Officers responsible for the project.
25. Members of the review group endorsed the benefits of using the Commonplace platform and there is currently a pilot underway to test the effectiveness of this tool with an ongoing major works project.
26. It should be noted that use of digital tools such as Commonplace would be an enhancement to consultation with residents around major works schemes but that more traditional forms of consultation, including face to face and telephone conversations as well as letters, booklets and leaflets will also be used to ensure that all residents, including those without access

to digital platforms, are able to receive information and have their views heard throughout every project.

27. It was also suggested to the review group to create an appendix within the new standards to clearly show the allocation of responsibilities of each individual involved in a major works project. This appendix clearly explains the level of authority each individual has and their responsibilities.
28. This idea was accepted by the review group and can be found in appendix 2 of the proposed new standards.

### **Knowledge**

29. One of the concepts presented to the review group was the introduction of a pre-scheme survey, which could help the investment delivery team better engage with residents at an early stage and will also help them gain a better understanding of the condition of residents' homes before the design stages of any project.
30. The pre-scheme survey was agreed by the review group and a draft of the questions to be included in the survey was sent to the review group to examine and provide feedback. No major changes were made to the survey and it was agreed that the proposed survey would be sufficient..
31. Additionally it has been suggested within the proposed new standards that all face to face meetings are also offered virtually using tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, to increase the number of residents that can attend these events from the comfort of their own homes.

### **Reasoning**

32. The proposed new standards have clear stages to show residents the evidence that lies behind the basis for making decisions.
33. At the first two meetings a dedicated item on the agenda was included in order to have open and honest discussions with residents about the introduction of an independent surveyor, should residents have technical reasons to disagree with the original recommendations. This discussion was led by residents and at the first meeting it was also agreed that the residents in the review group would bring ideas and recommendations to the second meeting on how this could be introduced.
34. At the second meeting it was suggested to the review group that within the proposed new standards, the investment delivery team will appoint an independent surveyor to review the proposed works, if at least 20% of residents within a project had technical reasons to disagree with the original recommendations.

35. The review group was also advised that the cost of an independent surveyor would be included as part of the total project cost and therefore rechargeable to homeowners.
36. The idea was accepted by the review group and can now be found within point 13 of the proposed new standards.

### **Power**

37. It is now clear within the new proposed standards who is involved at all stages of any project and when key decisions are made.
38. One of the suggestions received from the MySouthwark Homeowners Service was to include an option for residents to review the delivery routes proposed by the investment delivery team when selecting a contractor for a major works project.
39. The idea was presented to the review group in order to include an specific point in the proposed new standards.
40. Within the revised standards residents now have the opportunity to discuss and review both the works and the delivery route. This will also help the Council improve its consultation with residents to ensure it helps towards meeting the Great Estates policy and its guarantee.

### **Impact**

41. The new proposed standards will ensure that residents and officers discuss any potential disruptions and inconvenience during the works.
42. In order to increase the effectiveness of our communications it was proposed to the review group that a text messaging tool could be introduced to help the investment delivery team send notifications to residents during a project.
43. The review group raised concerns about the use of such tools and recommended that if this tool was to be used, special care should be taken to limit the automation of the text messages being sent.
44. There is currently an ongoing pilot to review the effectiveness of using text messaging and to establish how non-automated text messages might be used whilst at the same time being cost and time effective for the Council.

### **The affective**

45. The process has resident involvement at its heart at all stages from start to finish. This will help ensure that residents feel respected and valued both as individuals and as a group.

## **Feedback from residents in the review group**

46. The discussions held during the first and second meeting produced a number of recommendations which were all logged and taken into account and included within the new proposed standards. The below is a complete list of key feedback received during the first two meetings:
- a) The review group provided feedback on current major works communication methods including S20 notices, letters (wording, structure etc.), pre-scheme and resident satisfaction surveys.
  - b) New PRF standards document to include section that shows who is involved, who they are and what they are there to do.
  - c) New PRF standards document to include a note to show how to progress complaints for staff and contractors - clearly showing the structure so residents know who to escalate to.
  - d) New PRF standards document to include mention of using posters to advertise meetings and drop-ins.
  - e) New PRF standards document to include note that resident project team meeting times to be agreed with residents.
  - f) New PRF standards document to include section on how major works take into account residents that have special requirements.
  - g) New PRF standards document and all other major works content sent to residents to be written in Plain English.
47. After reviewing all the feedback received during the meetings the new PRF standards have increased from 25 to 33.

## **Policy implications**

48. The proposed new standards will replace the current PRF Standards.
49. The proposed new standards are expected to increase resident involvement and engagement during major works projects.
50. By increasing resident involvement and engagement during major works it is also expected that the overall resident satisfaction with the works and materials used during any major works projects are also improved.

## **Community impact/equalities statement**

51. The aim of this review is to enable the council to carry out more effective resident engagement and consultation. It is intended that this will lead to improved engagement and consultation with individuals affected by major works.
52. The approach proposed in this report recognises the diversity of our communities, and the need to provide better and wider opportunities for individuals to participate and to influence major works projects.
53. An equalities analysis has been completed addressing the proposals outlined in this paper which also comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.
54. Potential issues which arose out of the equalities impact analysis are all covered within the procedure, including the appropriate mitigations.
55. The new proposed standards contain the use of online meetings, complementary to meeting in person, which will benefit and mitigate the impacts to those residents who are unable to attend physical meetings. They also take into account the flexibility needed to hold meetings during day and evening time to take into account religious celebrations and residents with different working patterns.
56. The new proposed standards include the use of the Commonplace website for major work projects, complementary to more traditional physical forms of information distribution, which will benefit residents in finding information and documents relating to their property in one place.
57. The new proposed standards include information and details on how to access translation services by those residents whose first language is not English.
58. When the Officer team in charge of the review asked for volunteers during the first 5 Local Housing Forums in July 2020 to become part of a review group, it was requested that those interested in volunteering complete a details form. This form included questions on residential status and ethnic background which enabled the Officer team to ensure the review group was formed from a diverse group of residents including both tenants and homeowners.
59. In total 14 residents volunteered from the Housing Forums, 7 of whom were tenants and the other 7 were leaseholders.

60. The table below shows the background information collected from the details form:

Other White	1
White British	1
Other Black	3
Black British	4
Prefer not to say	2
Not returned	3

### **Climate change implications**

61. As this is an operational process setting out the practical steps that will underpin resident engagement and involvement with major works schemes there are no climate change implications per se. However, the potential introduction of measures and works to reduce carbon emissions will form part of every major works scheme design process and these measures will be fully discussed with residents on a scheme-by-scheme basis.

### **Resource implications**

62. The new proposed standards will be managed within existing resources.

### **Legal implications**

63. The legal implications and other comments from the Director of Law and Governance are set out below.

### **Financial implications**

64. There are no financial implications. The new proposed standards will be managed within existing resources.

### **Consultation**

65. Information and details about the consultation carried out as part of the review and proposed new standards are detailed throughout the report and in Appendix 2.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Director of Law and Governance**

66. The report recommends that the cabinet member for housing approve the reviewed Putting Residents First Standards, in Appendix 1. The standards set out how the council will consult and involve council tenants and homeowners on major works projects affecting their homes.
67. A local housing authority has a statutory duty to consult with its secure tenants under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 (HA 1985) on matters of housing management. There are similar obligations under Section 137 of the Housing Act 1996 for consulting with Introductory Tenants. The obligation applies where any of the council's secure or introductory tenants are likely to be substantially affected by a matter of housing management, including any changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of properties let by the Council or the provision of services in connection with those properties. This obligation applies where in the opinion of the council it represents a new programme of maintenance, improvement or demolition, or there is a change in the practice or policy of the authority and the secure or introductory tenants are likely to be substantially affected as a whole or a group of them. The arrangements set out in the standards document will assist the council in compliance with this statutory consultation duty in respect of major works.
68. As to council long leaseholders (homeowners), under section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (as amended) there are specific consultation requirements in relation to any services or work to the buildings or estate where their home is located and for which the leaseholder is required to pay towards the cost under the terms of their lease. The standards document references the section 20 process to be carried out in parallel with the arrangements set out in the standards document.
69. The report sets out the consultation that has been carried out on the reviewed standards. The cabinet member should take into account the outcome of consultation when taking a decision on the recommendation.
70. Due regard must also be had to the public sector equality duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This duty requires the council to consider all individuals when carrying out its functions. Specifically, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those who do not. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The cabinet member is referred to the Community Impact Statement in the report which sets out the consideration given to the PSED.

71. Any resident consultation and involvement must comply with the council's contract standing orders and terms of existing and future contracts with external suppliers.

**Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (H&M 21/018)**

72. This report seeks approval from the cabinet member for housing for the Putting Residents First Standards contained in Appendix 1, which set out the standards to be followed and the minimum level of service residents can expect when the council consults on planned major works. As outlined in the report, the standards are procedural in nature and there are no financial implications arising directly from their implementation, and will be managed and operated within existing budgets.

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Final Report- PRF 2015	Investment Delivery 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Sebastian Rios  0207 525 3370
<b>Link (copy and paste link into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s88294/Appendix%20%20-%20Putting%20Residents%20First%20Standards%20CURRENT.pdf">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s88294/Appendix%20%20-%20Putting%20Residents%20First%20Standards%20CURRENT.pdf</a>		
Putting Residents First Review- Update	Investment Delivery 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Name: Sebastian Rios  0207 525 3370
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?id=7055">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?id=7055</a>		

**APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Draft Putting Residents First Standards
Appendix 2	Findings and Conclusions of Task & Finish group report
Appendix 3	Major Works Offer v2 Revised
Appendix 4	Equalities/Health Analysis

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Council Homes and Homelessness	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	David Hodgson, Director of Asset Management	
<b>Report Author</b>	Sebastian Rios, Service Development Officer	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	2 September 2021	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Law and Governance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		2 September 2021