

April Update from the working group meetings

Split household meeting 24th March

Attendees Gita, Jackie, Mina and Shifra

The meeting emphasised the importance of maintaining residents' trust through open communication and ensuring that the promises made during the housing regeneration project are upheld. WDCO reiterated the need for the original split household offer to be retained until all existing Hackney Social Rented Tenants are rehoused—i.e. into Phase 5. This is a red line for WDCO, as it ensures all families are treated equally on the estate. They also noted that the split household policy has, to date, improved the viability of the regeneration by enabling a mix of smaller units and significantly smoothing the decant process; it has likewise prevented any tenant objections to CPOs.

WDCO recommended that LBH provide a structured oversight system for its allocations decisions, thus offering accountability and transparency, including the possibility of an independent appeals mechanism for individual decisions. They agreed that Hackney should set an annual quota for out-of-phase split households (OPSH), taking into account the homelessness pressures LBH faces and the need for temporary accommodation.

Policy Review

- Hackney explained the challenges in implementing the current policies, noting that the policy needs reviewing because it may be unsustainable.
- Ongoing pressures include limited housing stock.
- Cabinet will ultimately decide on any future policy adjustments.

WDCO and ITLA Concerns

- Emphasised prioritising policies around urgent housing needs, including severe overcrowding and disrepair.
- Suggested that any revised out-of-phase split household approach prioritise housing needs, tackling issues such as overcrowding, disrepair, and medical/social concerns, rather than using the current crude system of phase and length of tenancy.
- Highlighted significant delays and confusion around the current policy, arising from varied interpretations by council officers.
- Stressed the importance of transparency and oversight in decision-making, particularly within the DART team.
- Proposed an appeals process for allocation decisions to ensure consistent policy application.
- Medical assessments appear to be used inconsistently as part of the allocation process.

Consultation Plans

- Hackney committed to consulting residents.
- ITLA and WDCO suggested including Turkish translation, drop-in sessions, and door-knocking of existing Hackney social rent tenants in later phases.
- Requested that the questionnaire be circulated to ITLA in advance for comment.
- Consultation should aim to capture resident perspectives and measure impact.
- Feedback gathered will be used to inform recommendations.

Future Steps & Considerations

- Emphasised the need for flexibility in policy to accommodate those with extreme housing needs.
- Called for clear guidelines and effective communication of ongoing decisions and policy changes to residents.
- WDCO members asked for oversight mechanisms to ensure fair and equitable policy application.
- ITLA suggested a special cases panel for dealing with exceptional housing requirements.

Block D working group meeting 24th March (Update from Kristina)

Attendees Kristina, Tina and Leonora

This was the first meeting after a long break. The focus of the counsel and Millco is on (i) finalising operational agreement that would capture also how community benefit is delivered and (ii) launching the marketing to identify tenants.

Marketing

- As the ease was signed things are moving towards the marketing phase.
- Mill Co provided an update on marketing – marketing materials are being prepared and MillCo is looking to sound these out and start getting better sense on potential tenant interest. There is a sense on the lack of coordination and proper project management (probably by the council). It seems after a long pause fit out is going full speed with little warning signs or time given to MillCo to allow them to coordinate the marketing. MillCo is trying to get more clarity on the fit-out process before pushing out the marketing full on.
- Marketing materials are being finalised. Attached a draft / example of social media advertising.
- Mill Co suggest a renaming of Block D - approach would need to be agreed and community input can be considered.
- **For WDCO to consider:** discuss if they want to put any ideas forward for the new name for Block D.

Developing community benefits / local community groups

- There was a discussion on this point to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- It was agreed that the operational agreement needs to ensure that the benefits that the space will be giving are set out clearly and that this can be monitored. Mill Co/Hermione confirmed that operational agreement is part of the lease as an appendix, so defaulting on the terms of the operational agreement also means defaulting on the lease.
- Noted that Block D will need to be financially sustainable, which may impact on how sublets are handled. Sustainability of the operations should be a key consideration. Working with groups to help them get to a place where they are sustainable themselves.
- WODCO rep suggested for MillCo to consider the input WDCO has collected on various community groups in the area (this was to be shared by Roda)
- Mill Co highlighted that including Friends of Woodberry Down in block D is challenging due to the need for a kitchen, and because a large amount of space is needed but only once or twice a week. However Mill Co is keen to work with groups to develop the offer coming out of Block D for them in terms of space and activities.

- Group discussed the need to confirm with WDCO what they want to see from Block D while at the same time balance with what is deliverable and what will coordinate with other local uses in Woodberry Down.
- **For WDCO to consider:** Block D needs to be a self sustainable space and this is the primary objective in making decision on tenants. While the aim is to look for opportunities to support local community groups, including by providing affordable or even free space, such provision cannot be guaranteed. MillCo will aim to work with various community groups and look for ways to support local groups. Nevertheless, there shouldn't be expectations of guaranteed free space provision. With regards to Friends of Woodberry Down specifically, additional challenge is posed by their need for fully fitted kitchen among others which makes Redmond centre a better fit.
- **For WDCO to note:** The scope of the working group going forward. Working group WDCO reps (Kristina) are happy to work on revising existing working group ToR. Aim is to ensure oversight over tenant selection and delivery of community benefit while providing MillCo with sufficient flexibility to establish uses and develop activities. Working group can update WDCO and share revised ToR once drafted before it is finalised.

Next Steps

- Meeting is scheduled for next week. Aim is to discuss marketing approach.

Phase 3 rents (WDCO pre-meet 8th April):

Attendees Jackie, Hilary, Omar and Shifra

The group met to discuss key concerns around the affordability of Phase 3 rents, particularly the sharp increase in rent levels when moving from older blocks to new ones. While the rents are technically in line with London averages, the issue lies in the significant uplift and the rent-setting formula itself.

Key Discussion Points:

- The current rent formula is not fit for purpose in the context of London and is likely affecting other estates in a similar way. The group questioned how rent levels are handled on other estates, such as the Colville Estate, and whether alternative approaches exist elsewhere.
- There is uncertainty around whether Hackney has reviewed the rent levels for Phase 3B, and if any steps have been taken to verify the accuracy of these figures. The rent book evaluation should have been carried out much earlier—possibly delayed due to viability considerations.
- It was noted that the issue is not simply about the notice period. Even with sufficient notice, the proposed rents remain unaffordable for many residents.
- Residents should have been given a clear indication of the likely rent and service charges before the tenants' choice process began. Better communication and preparation could have helped avoid the current concerns.
- There is a strong need for lower rents if residents are to remain on the estate. The group expressed concern that without intervention, affordability will continue to worsen in later phases.



- The original intention of the masterplan was to provide genuinely affordable housing, but current rent levels are undermining that goal.
- The possibility of lobbying the Housing Minister for support was raised.

Service charges were also raised as a concern—Hackney could have done more to prepare residents for the additional costs.

Looking Ahead:

- The group questioned what Hackney is planning for future phases and emphasised the need for a long-term solution to ensure residents are not priced out of the estate.
- They plan to postpone the upcoming meeting with Hackney in order to gather more information—specifically the confirmed rent figures for Phase 3B—and to develop a clearer strategy.
- It is anticipated that rents for Phase 3B may be even higher than those for 3A, increasing the urgency of the issue.

Meeting with Hackney:

- The group agreed that the presence of senior representatives from Hackney at the meeting is essential for ensuring meaningful progress.
- They highlighted the importance of having data not only on residents' decisions regarding new apartments but also on the impact of rent increases on those decisions.
- Gathering data on empty or unallocated apartments was also discussed as a way to strengthen the case for improved affordability.

Hackney Operational meeting 27th March (decant and voids update)

Attendees Phil Cooke

Voids Update – Phase 4: There are currently 149 voids. Hackney will follow up with the rest the voids data. Hackney also advised that some of the voids have expired gas safety checks, and these are being dealt with.

Decant Update: The decant of secure tenants in Phase 4 should be completed by the end of April, with only 4 secure tenants currently left. Two tenants are moving off the estate; both have viewed and accepted properties. One tenant moved this week, and the other is due to move soon.

Surplus homes: Hackney have approached residents in later phases to see if they are interested in the surplus homes. There are now 14 surplus homes in Phase 3A.

The Decant team is processing the homes loss payment and disturbance payments.

Block 3B: Not all properties have been pre-allocated yet. Only 27 properties have been reallocated, with some residents also expressing interest in potentially moving to Block A.

Other Updates: A paper is being prepared for Cabinet regarding the inclusion of Phase 5 in the decant process, which is planned for Autumn 2025."

ITLA has also asked Francis from Hackney to provide the following information:

- How many unallocated/surplus properties are there in Phase 3A and 3B?
- Of the available surplus homes in Phase 3A and 3B, how many are 3, 2, and 1-bedroom flats?
- Could you provide a breakdown of the voids, including the phase and the number of bedrooms?
- Could you confirm how many residents have declined the offer for Phase 3A and 3B? And, how many of those are from Phase 5, and how many are from later phases?

Executive Committee Meeting 25th March and 8th April

Attendees Executive Committee members, although the meeting on the 8th was open to the entire Board.

The **Executive Committee on 25th March** discussed several follow-ups matters from the previous meeting. Leonora and Kalu provided updates on financial arrangements, including upcoming access for the Vice Treasurer to WDCO bank accounts, scheduling a Finance Committee meeting, and clarifying a funding application by Adrian for the WDCO event.

ITLA also presented figures from Hackney's operational meeting, discussed ongoing delays in rent and service charge confirmations for Phase 3, and raised concerns over NHG's failure to notify residents. The committee also discussed unresolved issues around the Culture Strategy and historic service charge surpluses and deficits.

Other matter that was discussed included service charge complaints and communication with NHG, with a plan to consolidate feedback and request a formal meeting. Omar raised concerns about rising rent pressures on temporary accommodation residents, suggesting Hackney establish clearer principles for treating these tenants fairly.

Further updates included developments in the Block D community space agreement and plans for operator engagement. The committee also discussed the Section 106 presentation for the April Board and considered Berkeley's request for a planning testimonial—pending Board approval.

The **Executive Committee meeting on 8th April**, which also included other Board members, focused on the governance proposal arising from the partners' awayday. Please see below for the outcome of this discussion.

- WDCO members expressed dissatisfaction with the current escalation system, highlighting a lack of meaningful escalation. It was noted that there is little to no real escalation process. While the document discusses the structure, it does not effectively address how the working groups and meetings are functioning or how WDCO's and residents' needs and priorities are being met. There were also concerns raised about whether the right people from the organisations are attending these meetings, and whether they are senior enough to make

decisions. Furthermore, the role of R&R in this is unclear, especially as they are now managing an increasing number of properties across the estate.

- In section 2.3, the necessity of an overarching programme to guide partnership objectives was debated, with differing opinions on the involvement of WDCO and delivery partners. While there was general agreement on the need for such a programme to inform the partnership's direction, some WDCO members felt that they should have a role in shaping it and should be able to comment on the overarching programme. WDCO needs a clear statement of what this programme is.
- Concerns were raised about the reduction of meetings with senior management, specifically the Round Table meeting every three months. Some emphasised the importance of maintaining contact for issue resolution, while others supported the reduction to allow more time to resolve issues. However, this would only be acceptable if concerns and issues could be resolved in an appropriate timeframe. The proposed streamlining of working groups into a centralised meeting raised doubts regarding its feasibility, with the view that each working group should have its own Terms of Reference (ToR) and priorities. Streamlining would be difficult and might not address the specific needs of each group.
- There was also discussion about how partners and WDCO will be able to review the governance model and assess its effectiveness. Also, how can partners and WDCO ensure that operational issues remain within the relevant meetings and do not spill into other areas of the regeneration? although, some operational issues should be fed back into the lessons learned for future phases.

WDCO members agreed that the governance model should be trialled for a period of three to six months, with a subsequent review.

Upcoming Meetings

Round Table meeting is scheduled for 17th April, update on the outcome of this meeting will be provide in the May Board update.

Service charge meeting scheduled for 24th April, update on the outcome of this meeting will be provide in the May Board update.