

WOODBERRY DOWN COMMUNITY ORGANISATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes Tuesday 3rd February 2026 7 pm Zoom Meeting

Attendance : Adrian Essex, Gita Sootarsing, Oonagh Gormley, Hilary Britton, Omar Villalba

Visitors included: Roda Hassan

Section 0 - Introduction

0.1 Apologies for absence: Leonora Williams, Gloria Obilana, Ameera Hassan

Section 1 and 2

1. Minutes of meeting 6th January 2026:

1.1. The minutes were checked for accuracy and accepted.

2. Matters Arising:

- 2.1. The Chair noted that the insistence to meet NHG's conditions makes it difficult to keep RAs in those blocks in existence. Omar added that residents found it supportive to have a few motivated people door-knocking on their behalf. The Executives agreed to address these problems at the meeting and request for NHG to send people to make things happen.
- 2.2. Sarah Connelly from NHG's Social & Economic team gave her presentation at the January Board. The Executives learned that Active Within are running 540 classes. The Chair asked how many classes should have been run and does this represent good value for money?

ACTION: The Executives to consider further questions to ask NHG's Social & Economic team on how Active Within's work benefits the community.

- 2.3. The Executives will no longer reach out to coordinate another meeting with RA's.
- 2.4. Omar proposed holding a walkabout and this is still to be arranged.
- 2.5. The Executives agreed not to request a mitigation strategy for the split household policy until there is clarity on what Hackney will doing in terms of the split household (review due summer 2026).
- 2.6. The Public Forum is a top priority and is being organised.
- 2.7. The Chair raised that WDCO will need to revisit the constitution.
- 2.8. WDCO have managed to spread the workload with the Board members outside of the Executive Committee, who will be organising the Public Forum.
- 2.9. The Board had a dedicated discussion on WDCO's future role.

- 2.10. WDCO agreed that MHDT no longer feels like part of the community and Gita taking on roles they should be performing and WhatsApp groups providing support for grassroots demonstrates this.
- 2.11. The Chair updated that there will be a camera with better sound to hold a hybrid meeting at the February Board.
- 2.12. Roda requested for comments on what the Public Forum should address but has only received comments from Adrian and Oonagh, which were useful.

ACTION: Roda to share feedback with Ekaterina, Kristina, William and Phil to come up with a proposal on what the Public Forum should address and share at the February Board.

- 2.13. The Chair has not yet discussed the door knocking exercise with William and will chase this up.

ACTION: Chair will clarify with William on door knocking exercise with the Cllr's and whether he is representing himself or as a WDCO representative.

- 2.14. Francis was unable to write the blog and the opportunity has now closed.
- 2.15. There was a brief discussion at the January Board on crime and outcomes from the Community Action Panel (CAP) meeting.
- 2.16. The Board discussed the future of WDCO and feedback from the Estate Management Board.
- 2.17. A group of Board members have volunteered to organise the Public Forum - Ekaterina, Kristina, William and Phil volunteered to participate.
- 2.18. The Board did not review the progress of blogs and social media.
- 2.19. Berkeley and NHG's Social & Economic Team delivered the presentation at the January Board.
- 2.20. NHG will provide a CCTV report following Omar's concerns on functionality and adequacy of CCTV at Watersreach.

3. **Invite Cllr Guy Nicholson to talk to us before the next board meeting on his view that the WD estate**

- 3.1. The Chair had a conversation with Cllr Nicholson who raised that he wants WDCO to expand into something more than it is now and expressed dissatisfaction with the work MHDT is delivering. The Chair asked if WDCO would like Cllr Nicholson to come and talk about his view on how WDCO changes in the future. Gita noted that the whole Board is not okay with his ideas.
- 3.2. The Chair proposed inviting Cllr Nicholson to come to a meeting outside the WDCO Board to hear what he has to say.
- 3.3. The Chair mentioned MHDT Board of Trustees held a meeting outside the Board to express dissatisfaction with MHDT's performance. The MHDT constitution states that the other partners' should each nominate someone to be on the MHDT Board.
- 3.4. Oonagh noted that there is a case that WDCO should morph into a community organisation and take over a level of management of MHDT.

ACTION: The Chair will invite Cllr Nicholson to discuss with WDCO Board members on how he sees WDCO developing and the role of MHDT.

4. **Public Forum**

- 4.1. The proposal for the Public Forum will be delivered at the February Board.

5. **June 10th 2026 is Age Without Limits day**

- 5.1. Age Without Limits Day will be celebrated at the Redmond Centre and the Zen Bus. Roda noted that, historically, the partners would do the Summer Fun Day in June and the Wimbledon screening in July and the suggestion last year was to combine them. The Chair responded that Grace (NHG), Rosalyn (BH) and Sarah Moore (LBH) will be discussing what the events are doing to be and will decide in March.

6. **Gareth Crawford's answers to the affordability questions:**

- 6.1 The Chair forwarded Gareth's answers to the affordability questions to the Executives on February 1st - Hackney have previously indicated their answers, which remains unchanged.
- 6.2 Oonagh noted it seems Hackney have the power to bring up the older rents in the earlier phases to converge.
- 6.3 Omar responded this is a failure of policy - the gap is too large for families and Hackney have raised the rents to the maximum this year for social rented and temporary accommodation tenants.
- 6.4 Omar raised the importance of communication and what policy will be brought to address the issue.
- 6.5 Oonagh pointed a potential loophole that Hackney cannot reduce the older ones but perhaps could reduce the unfairness by increasing some of the original rents.
- 6.6 Roda clarified that tenants moving into older blocks under new agreements are facing significantly higher rents, closer to those charged in the newer blocks, due to introductory tenancy terms. She further noted that rent increases in new properties would be a matter for NHG, as the property owner.
- 6.7 Roda added that young people moving into new homes on introductory tenancies pay rents closer to one-beds in the new blocks, compared to someone living in Woodberry Down prior to the regeneration.
- 6.8 Hilary noted there is limited wiggle room within government rules, meaning it is not easy to see where there are possibilities for make changes to affordability. Omar agreed, adding there is a lot to benefit from conversations and putting forward a challenge to represent the needs of the community, stressing the importance of documenting lessons.

ACTION: Roda to circulate Gareth's answers to the affordability questions to the wider WDCO Board.

7. **The Naturalist:**

- 7.1. The Chair has been posting on WhatsApp regarding the future of The Naturalist and how the issue might be addressed.
- 7.2. The Chair asked whether the estate should form a Naturalist action group. Hilary responded that there had previously been an attempt to sell the lease;

however, it is reportedly cheaper to leave the premises vacant. Gita explained that she had spoken to someone at The Naturalist, who advised that there had recently been a management meeting. She noted that part of the reason for its closure was an increase in antisocial behaviour (ASB), which left front-of-house staff feeling vulnerable, alongside reduced attendance due to safety concerns.

- 7.3. Hilary proposed writing to those responsible for Young's estate to ask what their future plans are and whether they intend to apply for a change of use to widen the market and re-let the space.

ACTION: The Chair send an email to Youngs to clarify their plans and explore options.

8. **Preparation for the February Board**

8.1. Agenda:

- Presentation on the consultation from BH
- Questions to the partners
- Gita will provide an update on social and economic cultural club activities at Nars.
- Proposal for the Public Forum.

ACTION: The Chair will send an email to the WDCO Board addressing Age Without Limits Day, attendance at the Board meetings, Woodberry Down history, membership of the MHDT Board, and the Naturalist.

- 8.2. The Executives proposed keeping the Board meeting shorter and without a break, noting that most Board members only stay for the first half of the meeting, especially in the winter. The Executives agreed to have no break for the meetings.

ACTION: The Chair to circulate email to the Executives before sending to the Board.

- 8.3. Gita asked who will be organising the meeting with Adrian, Hackney and Berkeley to discuss what support could be provided to local businesses over the next two years while demolition works are ongoing. Gita proposed inviting Necdet as a co-optee for the business side on the Board.

ACTION: Roda follow up with Tom to organise meeting on business initiative.