

Chair's Report 2025/26

It has been a genuine pleasure to chair WDCO over the past twelve months. We have maintained the long-standing collaborative relationships that are central to how Woodberry Down works — with Berkeley Homes, Notting Hill Genesis, the London Borough of Hackney and the Manor House Development Trust — while also engaging with a great many individual residents, partners and contributors along the way.

Among our corporate partners, there have been some notable changes. Gareth Crawford has moved on and Molly Perman returns to her role; Cllr Caroline Selman has stood down and been succeeded by Councillor Florence Cullen Davis; and Trevor has left Berkeley Homes. We wish them all well and look forward to building productive working relationships with those who have taken on their responsibilities.

The Executive and Board

I have been very well supported throughout the year by the members of the executive. Omar, Leonora, Hilary, Una and Gita have each given generously of their time and judgement, and I am grateful to all of them.

Gloria, too, has been a lively executive member, and I am delighted that she will continue to contribute to WDCO in a new capacity, taking on a special interest in the needs of elderly residents. This is an important area of our community's life, and Gloria is ideally placed to give it the focus it deserves.

Beyond the executive, the contribution of Board members across the year has been exceptional. Billy and Phil are a near-constant presence on the estate, particularly in Hackney and NHG walkabouts. Jackie has maintained strong attendance at events, the Partnership Board and the Design Committee. The Design Committee as a whole — Hilary, Billy, Jackie, Phil and Geoff — deserves particular recognition for the volume and quality of work they have put in. Liv brought valuable judgement to the selection of consultants for what we have been calling the ground floor strategy, and Mina has taken a welcome interest in the development of Residents' Associations.

Kristina, Andreea and Katya organised the community forum. Shifra and Omar were especially active when Phase 3 rent levels were announced — a moment that required careful, sustained engagement. And Gita and Necdet produced a series of evening events as part of the cultural programme that were warmly received.

This board makes a very good team. My apologies to anyone I've not remembered.

Partnership Board

The Partnership Board remains the key strategic meeting overseeing the regeneration programme, and WDCO representatives have used it to raise concerns about affordability, the

pace of delivery, community facilities, commercial spaces and the impact of delays on residents.

This year our contributions covered the future Community and Commercial Assets Strategy, Seven Sisters Road improvements, Block D, the Cultural Programme and the wider regeneration programme. We have continued to ensure that residents' concerns reach senior decision-makers from Hackney Council, Berkeley Homes and Notting Hill Genesis directly.

Estate Management Board

The Estate Management Board focuses on the day-to-day management of the estate and the issues that affect residents across all tenures. This year WDCO representatives raised concerns about CCTV coverage, public realm maintenance, estate services, community safety and the long-term funding of public spaces.

We also played an active role in reviewing and strengthening the Board's Terms of Reference — work that matters because it helps ensure the Board remains focused on delivering real outcomes, not only for residents but for our local businesses too.

Service Charges and Affordability

This has been one of WDCO's most significant areas of work during the year. We have continued to challenge delayed service charge accounts, billing errors and a lack of transparency in how charges are calculated. NHG has now completed a historic review of service charges and committed to meaningful reforms, including a new accounting model, improved systems and clearer communication with residents.

The Board has also continued to raise concerns about rents, heating costs and the overall affordability of living on Woodberry Down, particularly for social rented and shared ownership residents.

District Heat Network Working Group

After a long period of inactivity, the District Heat Network Working Group reconvened this year. This matters because decisions made here will shape the energy strategy for the estate for many years to come. WDCO has consistently argued that any future heating system must be affordable, transparent and reliable for residents, and we have raised questions about costs, governance, future regulation and how residents will be protected from financial and operational risks.

This year's discussions have focused on the energy strategy for Phase 4 and later phases, including proposals for alternative heating technologies. A new option has entered the reckoning — the exhaust air heat pump — which may substantially alter the outlook for the district heat network.

Safer Community Forum

Community safety remains a major concern for many residents, and WDCO representatives have attended the Safer Community Forum regularly throughout the year. Issues raised have included anti-social behaviour, theft, CCTV coverage, estate security and policing priorities.

This year we have helped to improve communication between residents, the police and housing providers, supported efforts to extend CCTV coverage, and ensured that community safety concerns remain a standing priority for all partners.

Cultural Programme and Community Activities

WDCO has continued to engage with the Woodberry Down Cultural Programme, funded through Section 106 contributions. We have raised questions about how funding is allocated, how residents can influence decisions, and how community benefit can be maximised as the programme develops and future contracts are procured.

Board members have also supported community events throughout the year — the Summer Fun Day and Screening, Hidden River Festival and Winterfest — helping to strengthen the connections that make Woodberry Down a neighbourhood rather than simply an estate.

Residents' Associations and Community Engagement

WDCO has continued to support Residents' Associations and encourage resident involvement across the estate. We have challenged proposals that could have created unnecessary barriers to participation and have argued throughout for a flexible, resident-led approach to community organisation.

The Public Forum organised by WDCO this year was particularly encouraging. Well attended by residents from across the estate, it gave people a direct opportunity to raise concerns, ask questions and hear about the work WDCO has been doing on their behalf — on service charges, heating and billing, parking, and the escalation of issues with delivery partners. The level of engagement demonstrated a genuine appetite among residents to shape the future of Woodberry Down, and the feedback we received has helped to inform our priorities for the year ahead.

Looking Ahead

The coming year will bring significant challenges and, I believe, real opportunities. Phase 4 construction, Phase 5 rehousing proposals, future energy systems, service charges, affordability and estate management arrangements will all demand careful attention. WDCO will continue to work on behalf of residents, to challenge where challenge is needed, and to ensure that the voices of residents remain at the centre of decision-making as Woodberry Down continues to evolve.

Adrian Essex, Chair, Woodberry Down Community Organisation
