

**WOODBERRY DOWN COMMUNITY ORGANISATION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Minutes
Tuesday 11th February 2025
7 pm Zoom Meeting**

Attendance: Jackie Myers, Oonagh Gormley, William Sheehy, Andrea Anderson, Adrian Essex, Kalu Amogu

Visitors included: Roda Hassan, Ameera Hassan, Omar Villalba, Hilary Britton, Shifra Appiah

Section 0 - Introduction

0.1 Welcome / Apologies for absence

Leonora Williams

0.2 Minutes of meeting 21st January 2025

0.21 The minutes were checked for accuracy and agreed.

0.3 Matters Arising

- 0.3.1 Roda circulated the figures of how many original residents are left to be rehoused. Francis Kwarteng from LBH provided the latest figures for the end of January to Roda, which was a total of 290 secure tenants that were left: 17 in Phase 4, 51 in Phase 5, 58 in Phase 6, 61 in Phase 7 and 103 tenants in Phase 8.
- 0.3.2 Adrian asked whether this information, on its own, would be useful. For example, if they know how many homes remain unoccupied in Phase 3 and how many are planned for Phase 4, would comparing these figures provide a clearer picture of the current situation?
- 0.3.3 Hilary raised that it would also be useful to consider that if few people from Phase 5 are accepting offers for Phase 3, there could be many empty flats. This should be monitored, as these flats could potentially be allocated to people from the estate. Roda noted that she can request the updated data on this breakdown if needed.
- 0.3.4 Adrian added that having this breakdown would offer insight into the health of the regeneration, enabling the WDCO Board to assess how well or poorly the regeneration is progressing.
- 0.3.5 Omar asked what WDCO hopes to learn from this data and how they can break down the figures further, potentially integrating them to highlight the impact of rent increases. The Chair suggested bringing this to the Board to see if anyone would be willing to take this on. Adrian proposed appointing someone to compile the information and present it in a tracker format. Omar recommended Shifra or Livia from the Board, as they have connections on the ground to challenge the data that has been provided.

ACTION: Roda will ask Hackney at the beginning of each month to provide the figures for the previous month.

0.3.6 Roda provided the minutes from the Phase 3 meeting.

0.3.7 This written update was received on Monday evening from Jake, one of the directors of NHG, which Roda circulated on Tuesday and shared with the Board on Wednesday.

0.3.8 Leonora has discussed with Kalu but the Executives will come back to the action when Leonora returns.

ACTION: Leonora will discuss with Kalu on how to move things forward.

0.3.9 The KSS3 Resident Associate meeting has not happened yet.

ACTION: Roda will invite the KSS3 Resident Association to the meeting.

ACTION: The Board will discuss the role of NHG as an agenda item for the March Board once there is an outcome on Phase 3.

ACTION: The Board will discuss strengthening relationships with stronger RAs for the March/April Board. Andrea will liaise with Roda and provide a written update at the Board.

0.3.10 There have been two coffee mornings at the Redmond Centre and WDCO reps are planning to host another one.

ACTION: William will attend an upcoming meeting at the Holloway site.

0.3.11 Roda circulated the actions from the January Board to the Executive Committee and the partners ahead of the Liaison meeting.

0.3.12 There was a brief meeting held after the Round Table in preparation for the awayday. Adrian asked about the report of the Partner Awayday. Roda responded that Lisa, the facilitator, will be producing the report.

ACTION: Roda will chase Lisa on when the report for the Partner Awayday will be shared.

ACTION: Roda will review the December Board minutes to identify outstanding actions.

ACTION: There will be a discussion at the February Board on agenda items for the March Board.

0.3.13 The apprentice programme will be presented at the February Board. Trevor confirmed at the Liaison meeting that this will be a 15-minute presentation from Berkeley.

0.3.14 Roda notified Nicolas that the KSS1 item is on the agenda. Roda also sent Nicolas an email asking for any paperwork he wanted to send out ahead of the meeting.

0.3.15 Adrian sent a document ahead of the meeting regarding the WhatsApp community. Adrian mentioned that there have been discussions in the

WhatsApp group on the backdated bills from 2021 and collecting the deficit for this at Hartington and Willowbrook.

ACTION: The WhatsApp community will be added to the February Board agenda.

0.3.16 Adrian sent a document for the Vice Chair vacancy and Design Committee ahead of the Executive Committee meeting today.

ACTION: The document on the Vice Chair and Design Committee vacancy will be circulated along with Board papers.

0.3.17 There are also vacancies for the Constitutional Working Group and Service Charge Working Group. Adrian will circulate the descriptions for the working groups along with the Vice Chair vacancy.

ACTION: Adrian to circulate the descriptions for the Vice Chair vacancy, constitutional working group and service charge working group. Adrian will send the revised version by Thursday.

Section 1 - Major Topics

1. Phase 3 Rents

- 1.1. Omar reported that discussions on rent reductions are ongoing, with some back-and-forth on the percentage reductions. While this debate is proving useful, the draft paper still needs to be finalised. Omar emphasised the need to push for equal treatment across all social housing blocks on the estate. He also noted that the document should stress the challenges faced by residents with disabilities and call for further surveys in Phase 3, as it is evident that those with high needs and low incomes are not receiving adequate support.
- 1.2. Omar, Shifra and Hilary have spoken to multiple residents, identifying key issues that they have compiled into a semi-report. They plan to conduct further discussions to provide a comprehensive review of conditions in Phase 3. Omar summarised that the report should focus on equality across the estate, convergence, and the treatment of residents with disabilities and high needs in the regeneration process. He also noted that the ward councillors have issued a letter advocating for convergence, but an email circulated from NHG outlined why this may not be feasible.
- 1.3. Oonagh argued that NHG's claim that they "cannot afford it" is unacceptable, as residents in this phase should receive the same treatment as previous phases. Omar agreed, stating that equality in social housing across the estate should be a fundamental expectation.
- 1.4. Hilary inquired whether extra funding had been available when convergence was originally implemented in Phase 1.

ACTION: Roda will investigate and report back.

- 1.5. Omar also pointed out that WDCO's main leverage in negotiations is NHG's poor communication, which should be a central argument. He suggested involving

Susanne from LBH to reinforce WDCO's position, highlighting that even a 65% rent increase is unmanageable for residents who had no time to prepare for it.

- 1.6. The Chair asked if residents with disabilities and additional needs had been consulted. Omar responded that one resident has provided detailed feedback on her challenges, particularly regarding her daughter with special needs, whose needs were not accommodated.
- 1.7. Roda clarified that Omar's concerns should be viewed in two parts: cost-related issues and the decant process itself. She has raised some of these issues regarding the decant process separately with NHG and Hackney and suggested that Shifra and other Board members take the lead in reviewing the logistics of the decant process and the support being provided.
- 1.8. Roda informed the Executives that previous phases had a Tenant Support Officer to assist vulnerable residents during the move. She has asked Hackney and NHG about alternative support.
- 1.9. There was a brief discussion about the strategic actions & next steps:
 - Guy Nicholson's Role: Omar suggested involving Hackney's Executive Director, Guy Nicholson, emphasising his long-standing commitment to the scheme. The focus should be on Hackney, not just NHG, as it is ultimately their project.
 - Assumed Energy & Council Tax Costs for the Affordability Assessment: Omar and Hilary proposed requesting confirmation of the assumed council tax and energy costs used in the affordability assessment. They questioned whether these costs were based on residents' current cost in the Hackney blocks or on NHG's estimated costs for Phase 3.

ACTION: Roda will check what the assumed energy costs used for the affordability assessment.

- Support for Vulnerable Residents:

- 1.10. Omar confirmed that the draft letter, initially addressed to NHG, should now also be directed to Hackney's Executive Director, Guy Nicholson, and ward councillors to demonstrate WDCO's seriousness.
- 1.11. Shifra sought clarification on whether "equality" meant consistent rents across all phases or alignment with Phase 1 and 2 rents. Omar clarified that the current approach disproportionately affects certain households. Shifra agreed, adding that miscommunication and misinformation have been major issues, with many residents unaware of their actual rents before moving in.
- 1.12. William warned that if residents in other phases learn about the current situation, it could undermine confidence in the entire regeneration project. Omar agreed, stating that if NHG refuses rent convergence, they must at least be transparent about rent increases, as this could shift public opinion.
- 1.13. Omar asked if Executive approval was needed before finalising the paper. The Executives approved Omar, Hilary, Shifra, William and Jackie to proceed.

ACTION: Omar will finalise the paper, incorporating key point on equality across the estate.

- 1.14. Shifra asked whether residents were aware of the 14th February deadline. Roda confirmed that at the Phase 3 meeting, WDCO asked Hackney and NHG how

this would be communicated. They responded that the decant and housing officers would inform residents individually.

- 1.15. Roda suggested that she and Shifra meet to draft a separate letter to Hackney regarding the decant process, using survey data collected by the WDCO reps. Omar recommended conducting further resident surveys to strengthen their position before doing this. He also suggested scheduling a dedicated two-hour session to review the findings in detail.

2. Phase 3 Council tax appeal

- 2.1. Hilary reported that she sent a letter to the Valuation Office challenging the Council Tax Band 4 classification for all three-bedroom houses in Meadowhawk and Eastacre, as well as one of the apartments in Anax. She provided an update that they now have to wait for a response. If the classification is changed, it will be backdated to the date of initial registration.
- 2.2. Omar asked if WDCO should consider reviewing Phase 3B in relation to council tax. Hilary responded that it is not yet registered, but they can review it. Since NHG has not taken it over yet, they are responsible for submitting the information to the Valuation Office.

3. Chairs letter to the CEO of NHG in October - no response

- 3.1. NHG only informed the Chair after four months that the letter to the CEO had been redirected to NHG's complaints team.
- 3.2. Roda mentioned that during the Liaison meeting, NHG stated that since last summer, their new process dictates that any letter addressed to the CEO is processed by the complaints team.
- 3.3. Omar suggested that WDCO could use this issue as leverage, given that the CEO only responded when it came to the rent issue. The Chair asked the Executives whether another letter should be resubmitted to the CEO.
- 3.4. Hilary proposed preparing a paper outlining all issues with NHG. Roda noted that NHG's performance will be on the agenda for the March/April Board. Oonagh expressed that NHG's decision to redirect the letter to complaints demonstrates their disregard for WDCO. She also questioned whether the complaints team even addressed the issue or provided a timeline.
- 3.5. Omar suggested this emphasised NHG's ongoing failures in service charge performance as a key issue. The Executives agreed to leave the letter as it is and await a response from the complaints team. They discussed this as part of NHG performance at the March Board.

Proposals for February Board Agenda

- 3.6. The apprenticeship presentation from Berkeley will be 15 minutes long. Roda asked the Executives whether they want questions on partner updates to follow the presentation and how much time should be allocated for this discussion.
- 3.7. The Executives briefly reviewed the other items on the February Board agenda. Roda also asked how much time should be allocated for the Delegation of Powers discussion. Adrian noted that a few written questions might arise from the written reports and partner updates, which could require additional time.

ACTION: Roda will send a draft agenda with timeline tomorrow morning and adjust it as needed.

ACTION: The Executives will email Roda after the meeting with estimated times for each agenda item.

4. Partners Awayday

- 4.1. Roda noted that the first half of the Awayday focused on what participants were most proud of regarding the regeneration and the achievements of Woodberry Down. Then they worked in small groups of five to assess their feelings on trust, respect, and communication with the partners. Roda mentioned that the later part of the Awayday felt more like a governance meeting, where participants reviewed an organogram of the various meetings to determine which should be changed or removed. The SMB meeting stood out as many were unclear on its purpose and whether it was needed.
- 4.2. William felt it was not an effective session. The Chair observed that the facilitator was not accustomed to running all-day sessions and that the Awayday lacked structure, clear actions, and follow-up steps.
- 4.3. Adrian criticised the agenda as carelessly planned, essentially a repeat of previous sessions with complex and inappropriate questionnaires.
- 4.4. Andrea raised concerns about negative responses from MHDT's and the NHG director when she discussed rents for Phase 3 and social housing. She felt they were condescending. Andrea also noted that the partners seemed unaware of their role in the regeneration.

ACTION: Roda will inform the Executives at the next meeting when the Awayday report will be published.

5. Update on Round Table and SMB meeting (written update)

- 5.1. Roda circulated the SMB meeting notes and asked the Executives to email her with any follow-up questions.
- 5.2. Omar raised concerns about temporary accommodation and mentioned that Molly from LBH invited him to the meeting. He will also be inviting the Temporary Accommodation (TA) residents to ensure they receive the services they need. Omar emphasised the importance of an accountability loop to build confidence among TA members and ensure Hackney is delivering a decent service. He also noted that the London Renters Union is involved due to their strong advocacy for temporary accommodation issues.
- 5.3. The Chair acknowledged the challenges faced by temporary accommodation residents and offered to support Omar in reaching them. Omar requested that the Chair attend the meeting as a demonstration of their commitment, and the Chair agreed to attend and provide support.

ACTION: Roda will provide a brief summary of the Round Table meeting once she receives the minutes.

6. Service charge working group update

- 6.1. Roda updated that the last Service Charge Working Group meeting was held two weeks ago. Errors in the final budget were still being identified, and the group requested that NHG make necessary corrections before the budget is approved and sent back to the working group. The revised budget was sent to the group yesterday, and it was agreed that a letter would be sent to residents with: A breakdown of service charges, FAQs and an explanation of each service

- 6.2. NHG provided a draft letter on Friday, but it lacked key details, including: An explanation for why service charges changed, the corrections made, a summary of past discussions and a detailed breakdown of service charges.
- 6.3. Roda was also unclear whether the spreadsheet would be shared with residents. WDCO members provided feedback, which Roda relayed to NHG on Monday morning. She has also since requested confirmation that the letter has not been sent out yet and that a redraft is in progress. She has emailed NHG and will update WDCO members once a response is received.

ACTION: Roda will keep WDCO members updated on the response from NHG and the timeline for reviewing the redraft.

7. AOB

- 7.1. Adrian asked Kalu for an update on Leonora's action point regarding treasury processes and bank accounts. Kalu explained that he met with Leonora, who wanted to understand how the accounts were managed and how transactions were recorded. He went through the process page by page, covering payment requests, authorisations, and approval procedures.
- 7.2. Adrian clarified that, per the WDCO constitution, the Board should receive monthly financial reports and that expense claims should be processed via bank transfer or a WDCO card to prevent personal out-of-pocket payments. Kalu responded that while bank transfers were not possible previously, they are now being used. He also noted that the Redmond Centre requires references for invoices and assured Adrian he would review any outstanding payments.
- 7.3. Kalu stated this was the first time he was informed that a monthly report must be submitted to the Board, as he had previously only provided an end-of-year report before elections.
- 7.4. Regarding Hackney's funding, Kalu highlighted that payments should be made quarterly, but Hackney only released funds for Q1 and Q2 in January, causing cash flow issues. If WDCO had no remaining funds, some payments could not be processed.
- 7.5. Oonagh raised concerns that only one person fully understands and manages WDCO finances, posing a risk to the organisation. She attempted to be added as a bank signatory when she was Vice Treasurer, but this did not happen. Kalu clarified that while he is not opposed to adding signatories, HSBC makes the process difficult. Past attempts by Euphemia and Phil to be added were unsuccessful.
- 7.6. Adrian emphasised the need for both a Treasurer and Vice Treasurer to share responsibilities, reducing risk. Oonagh suggested that WDCO should consider switching banks, but Kalu explained that most banks require charity registration and specific income thresholds.
- 7.7. The Chair asked about discussions between Kalu and Leonora regarding a role swap. Kalu stated that since he was elected Treasurer, he could resign if needed, but changing roles now would be disruptive as the financial year-end approaches, requiring final account preparations.
- 7.8. Andrea and the Chair proposed pausing the discussion until Leonora returns.

ACTION: The discussion will be revisited when Leonora returns.

7.9. Roda highlighted that at the WDCO Awayday, Board members felt they were not receiving enough updates from key meetings. She prepared a summary of the SMB and service charge meetings and suggested providing a similar update to the Board.

ACTION: Roda will submit a summary paper covering the Service Charge Working Group, SMB meeting outcomes, and a Phase 3 update for the February Board.