

**WOODBERRY DOWN COMMUNITY ORGANISATION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Minutes
Tuesday 7th January 2025
7 pm Zoom Meeting**

Attendance

Jackie Myers, Oonagh Gormley, William Sheehy, Leonora Williams, Andrea Anderson, Adrian Essex

Visitors included

Simon Slater, Ameera Hassan, Paul Bragman, Omar Villalba

Section 0 - Introduction

0.1 Welcome / Apologies for absence

Kalu Amogu, Geoff Bell

1. Minutes of meeting 12th November 2024

1.1. Minutes were checked for accuracy and agreed.

2. Matters Arising

2.1. Roda circulated the partnerships agreement to the Board and provided background on its development.

2.2. William has asked the Board if there were any additional organisations in Woodberry Down to be included for the survey.

2.3. Hackney provided a written update to the Board following District Heat Network regarding the Arup feasibility study.

2.4. Regarding setting up the WDCO credit card, Leonora is waiting to consult this with Kalu who has been unwell. The Chair suggested for Kalu to send over the relevant information to Leonora.

ACTION: Leonora to follow up with Kalu regarding setting up WDCO credit card and to send over relevant information.

2.5. Roda circulated the Delegation of Powers document and this was discussed at November Board.

2.6. Andrea mentioned that the meeting to discuss setting up a Resident Association has not been arranged yet but will be carried forward. Oonagh suggested discussing this with Hillary as they have experience from KSS3.

ACTION: Simon will invite the KSS3 Resident Association to attend the meeting.

- 2.7. Roda provided the summary of Vice Chair priorities which was included with the Board papers.
- 2.8. A written update on the community group survey was delivered at the Board.
- 2.9. Adrian raised that the Board did not discuss the role of NHG and raised massive concerns regarding the role NHG over the last 2-3 years. Simon asked if they are looking to get rid of NHG. Adrian responded that this would be a nuclear option which would make things worse in the short term and that NHG are not responding well. Adrian suggested taking this to the Board for discussion first, as per the constitution, and the Executives take this on afterwards following the Board discussion. Oonagh mentioned that Hillary has already written a paper on this and that they have the framework to form a discussion on the role of NHG. Simon suggested that this goes to the Board by February/March after there is an outcome on Phase 3. William and Andrea asked if the Executives have other organisations in mind. They also raised that some other organisations, such as L&Q, are worse than NHG. Simon responded that this is just an initial discussion within the Board on what their options might be.

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

- 2.10. Strengthening of the relationship with stronger Resident Associations will need to come to the Board at a future date.

ACTION: The Board will discuss strengthening relationship with stronger RAs at a future date.

- 2.11. The site visit to the Phase 3 Community Space is yet to be arranged. The Executives agreed for this item to be added to the Board agenda for discussion.

ACTION: Phase 3 Community Space site visit will be added to the January Board agenda for discussion.

- 2.12. Roda included Adrian's document as part of the paperwork for November Board.

Section 1 - Major Topics

1. Preparation and Discussion with Paul Bragman, Awayday Facilitator, WDCO Awayday

- 1.1. As agreed in the proposal, Paul is in the process of having conversations with 5 Board members to provide a background of the session. He has already spoken to 3 Board members and is expected to speak to 2 more members, Jackie and Kristina.
- 1.2. Paul provided an outline of the Saturday session. He expects people to arrive from 9:45am and for the Awayday to start at 10am and finish by 3pm, with a 45 minute lunch break at 1pm.
- 1.3. Paul provided an outline of the purpose of the Awayday and the four key objectives of the Awayday: 1) To reflect on how WDCO is currently working and addressing the challenges they are experiencing, 2) Exploring and agreeing on

ways to strengthen what WDCO does, 3) Refreshing the core values of WDCO and what they value and aim for as an organisation 4) To explore and agree ways to strengthen decision-making and how the organisation operates.

- 1.4. Paul's emerging thoughts on the purpose of the Awayday is to reflect on how WDCO is working as an organisation and ways to strengthen what they do going forward. Paul is currently holding discussions with the Board members to find out their perspectives on the mechanics of WDCO.
- 1.5. There will be a welcome introduction and setting the scene at the beginning to kick off the Awayday. The key part will be establishing the ground rules of the day so that the facilitator can ensure people keep to these ground rules.
- 1.6. The first activity will be an interactive exercise looking at how WDCO got to where they are and their journey to date. During this exercise, the participants will be looking at key events, projects and challenges along WDCO's journey.
- 1.7. The next part of the Awayday involves discussions. There will be flip charts around the room and participants will write down their comments on post-it notes. This activity will focus on key questions relating to challenges for WDCO: what people are proud of in relation to WDCO, and what excites people about WDCO, and the organisation's work.
- 1.8. The next activity will be presenting and discussion, where participants will familiarise themselves with WDCO's vision and purpose. They will be looking at the values that underpin their work and organisation. This will link to conversations around behaviours and how WDCO works together. This section will be about reminding participants on the vision and purpose, touching base on core values, looking at behaviours and how WDCO works together and exploring how these behaviours align with the vision and purpose of the organisation.
- 1.9. The next activity will be a conversation around how to be an effective Board and decision-making. They will discuss whether WDCO have a shared understanding of what an effective Board looks like collectively. There will be discussions on how WDCO currently makes decisions and there will also be discussions and agreements on improving decision-making and strengthening how WDCO organises themselves.
- 1.10. After lunch, participants will be considering what WDCO needs to do moving forward, what key priorities they need to focus on and how WDCO can organise to deliver on these priorities. They will be thinking about communications, expectations of each other and how WDCO manages differences of opinions across the Board.
- 1.11. There will be a review of the Awayday before finishing at 3pm.
- 1.12. Omar mentioned to Paul that WDCO wanted to host the Awayday on Saturday in time for the Partners Awayday so that the Board was aligned on strategic objectives: to have discussions and negotiations with the partners, and to incorporate WDCO's comments on the proposals. Paul said that the afternoon activity will support this as they will focus on strategic objectives and WDCO's priorities for the year. WDCO can also integrate how the Board will feed into the Partners Awayday.
- 1.13. Adrian mentioned that visions and objectives of WDCO are set out in the beginning of constitution, and the visions of the partnership are set out in Partnership Agreement. Adrian suggested that perhaps more concrete, high-level visions and objectives are needed. Adrian will look into this before the WDCO Awayday at the weekend. Paul responded that the visions and objectives section of the WDCO Awayday will not be about duplicating or rewriting anything, but simply touching base on these visions and objectives.

- 1.14. William mentioned that WDCO had a lot of leaseholders before, and how they had to understand the issues and put themselves in their position. William suggested that going forward with shared ownership and private residents, WDCO needs to do the same thing.
- 1.15. Andrea raised that she missed the first part of Paul's discussion due to technical difficulties.

ACTION: Paul will have conversations tomorrow with Jackie and Kristina and will circulate a participants program for the Awayday to the Board members on Thursday.

- 1.16. Simon confirmed that The Edge is booked on Saturday and has arranged for a security guard to unlock the building and provide two backup phone numbers in case the security guard does not arrive to unlock. The downstairs space in The Edge will be available for WDCO and there is a small meeting room if preferred to be used. Jackie will arrange the food for the Awayday. So far, 11 people have confirmed attendance, and 4 people definitely said they will not be attending.

ACTION: Simon will speak to Young Hackney tomorrow to get screens sorted for any PowerPoints.

- 1.17. Jackie asked Leonora if there is a budget for food for the Awayday and if the Executives have any dietary requirements. Andrea confirmed she has a nut allergy, lactose intolerance, shellfish allergy and is pescatarian. Jackie confirmed she will make sure there are no nuts and for the fish to be cooked separately from the meat.

ACTION: Leonora will check with Kalu regarding budget for food and will get back to Jackie.

- 1.18. Omar mentioned the partners proposals and the Phase 3 issue, and asked if it would be worth looking at what WDCO can influence over the coming year? Paul will raise this during discussions on the priorities going forward.

ACTION: Simon will provide bullet points for Paul to be aware of in terms of important objectives for the partners this year and context on the regeneration at Woodberry Down. Simon will also let Paul know if Flipcharts are available.

- 1.19. Adrian asked where WDCO has found £2000 to pay for a facilitator as there was no money in the budget for this previously. Leonora responded that they will check with Hackney Council to see if they have forwarded the budget and that she will chase this up with Kalu. Simon responded that WDCO have £6000 to come from Hackney this year and 3 months left of budget before going back to them, so there should be flexibility within that and that this decision came from the November Board. Simon then procured three consultants, one from Adrian, one chosen by the council for the Awayday they are facilitating, and Paul as he worked for MHDT and has facilitated previous partner Awaydays. Oonagh responded that the Board cannot commit itself to overspend its budget, so every request from the Board should be contingent upon approval by the treasurer. Oonagh has previously asked about the treasurer, but was not given

a response. She feels that WDCO should have considered this more closely and that they should not commit to spending money unless they have it. William said that he assumed Kalu would have been in touch with Hackney as they usually have dates they pay in money. Simon added that the process is to agree the budget at the beginning of the financial year, which is then sent to Hackney for agreement and also to Isabelle, who agreed the budget this year. Roda then invoiced quarterlies, but heard nothing back so WDCO chased the council about it. Molly, who was new, came in and did not have processes on how the budget was agreed, so Simon ran through what has happened in the past, which she then checked internally with Hackney. Jackie and Simon then spoke with Molly before Christmas, who said she will get the first two payments as soon as possible but this would be after Christmas as WDCO had missed their check run. Oonagh raised how there is nothing in the budget to cover this expense, whether they receive the money or not, and are now committing £3000 in total.

- 1.20. Adrian raised that the November minutes state that the Board needs to come up with an agenda and arrangements for the Awayday, not that the Board had come up with an agenda and arrangements, meaning the Board has not considered this. Omar responded that the Board has committed themselves to the Awayday and have started the preliminary interviews and that it is too late to pull out, but to wait for confirmation for the budget.

4. Next Steps: Phase 3 Rents and Service Charges:

- 4.1. In terms of Phase 3, Omar raised that there was a poor presentation from NHG, a follow-up service charge meeting which had a relatively poor number of actions. There was also an email sent over to NHG asking for information and they responded on the last day that they did not have the information.
- 4.2. Since the New Year, Shifra and Liv have drafted a letter to the MP Housing Minister which is waiting to be circulated until they get the information which is due this Friday from NHG. Omar also followed up with Molly on Monday for her to support NHG to send the information and the correct council tax information.
- 4.3. Omar informed the Executives that NHG are firming up their position in terms of rents and will review the formulas, but it is unlikely they will further reduce the service charge and rents. Omar estimates that residents' costs will rise in April 2025 due to a scheduled increase in the service charge, which is set to take effect in three months. Additionally, NHG has yet to respond to Omar regarding the council tax bandings.
- 4.4. Once they receive this information, as well as the response from NHG email, they will circulate the letter and ask for a follow-up meeting. After that, this will need to be escalated and that the deadline for NHG is on 24th January. Omar mentioned that a lot of residents in Phase 5 have declined this move because of cost and are putting pressure on the remaining people in Phase 4 and TAs to move out by the end of January. Omar, Shifra and Liv's proposal is to get the letter done and get NHG to discuss this publicly at the WDCO meeting.
- 4.5. Omar has requested the Executives' support in advancing the agenda outlined in the letter, including sending additional emails and potentially escalating the issue to MPs. He also asked the Executives to follow up with Molly and Sarah to ensure a response is provided by the end of the week. Omar will update the draft letter and circulate it to Shifra and Liv for review. Additionally, Omar plans to request a follow-up meeting with NHG and Hackney to address outstanding actions, such as confirming the council tax charge. This information is critical,

as it will affect the comparison of costs between residents' old flats and the new ones.

- 4.6. Simon discussed with Cllr Sarah Young, who suggested that WDCO should approach NHG and ask them that the rent element of the new rents should be staggered over a number of years rather than go straight to target rent. Simon responded that Hackney should be having this conversation as this is their assigned signatory of the principle development agreement where this is enshrined and they are Hackney's existing tenants. Omar mentioned that the partners might not accept this and could argue that Hackney are interfering with their model as part of the joint venture. Omar will welcome suggestions or any support from Hackney to reduce the impact. He does not currently feel supported by Hackney as they are not effectively getting information from NHG and feels that Hackney is not taking responsibility for the situation.
- 4.7. Adrian asked if WDCO have heard back from the independent valuer. Omar responded that the independent valuer sent a holding email just before Christmas and will provide all the information this week Friday.
- 4.8. The Executives asked Omar what he wants them to add to the agenda. Omar responded that they will have the information by the end of this week and WDCO need to ask a number of questions regarding where they are with Phase 3. There are a number of questions to be emailed to Hackney to provide an update on where they stand in terms of decants for Phase 4 and 5. Simon asked Omar if he would be in a position to ask the Board to take a particular view on what they want done. Omar responded he will provide the questions and what needs to be issued to Hackney.
- 4.9. The Chair said that they need to first wait for the reply from NHG and see what they come back with before deciding what WDCO will discuss in their next steps. Omar replied that they will not decrease anything by an acceptable level by then and there will still be outstanding questions on the Phase 3 update. Adrian responded that NHG will likely come back with more delays and little more information. Adrian also mentioned that there were discussions before Christmas on taking this to the media and asked if WDCO are at the stage now to set out the things that have happened. Omar replied that this would be one way to hold NHG accountable publicly.
- 4.10. Oonagh added that WDCO should wait for NHG's reply just in case they surprise them and also provide this week to wait for a reply given the Christmas period. Oonagh also asked if there is a number WDCO would be happy with as a suitable reduction and that WDCO should agree on this. Omar responded that this will be agreed with Shifra and Liv as they move in to Phase 3a and 3b and that their target is equality with the first two phases. Omar added that they have not had a counter-proposal, have only had £10 knocked off the service charge and that there is no clarity on the council tax, rent review, if any further cuts have been made and updates delayed regarding the service charge. Omar feels that this is painting a picture for residents to make an informed decision that they can no longer afford to live here and potentially move somewhere else, and raised that a number of people in Phase 5 are not moving to Phase 3 for this reason. Oonagh agreed with Omar's point that this is unfair to Phase 3 residents but also thinks WDCO will never get to a position where they will make all rents the same and asked if it is realistic to hold out for this? Omar replied that this is WDCO's starting point for negotiation and that NHG have not made their starting point and will not have a dialogue, and echoed Simon's point on what Hackney's position is in facilitating this. Simon agreed with Oonagh that WDCO need to be clear on their outcome and to have a conversation with those Board members that have been campaigning and are

closer to understanding people's views on what they want to do. Simon also recognises Jackie and Oonagh's point, to give them time to come up with information following the Christmas period. If necessary, Simon stated the Board agenda can be changed with relatively short notice, depending on the information provided by NHG and that WDCO should have these discussions with the Board members who are campaigning to decide what they want.

- 4.11. William asked Simon regarding convergence rents, market rents and target rents for Phase 4. Simon answered that convergence rents are where people moved across from their old rent and moved up to what was target rent over a period of time by an increase above inflation, and Phases 2-5 and now 2-8 went straight in to target rent, and what we are seeing now is the modern version of this using the rent formula set by central government. WDCO are being impacted in a number of ways including the increase in valuation of new builds.
- 4.12. Oonagh suggested Sarah might be key to this and if WDCO should have a private chat with Sarah about considering escalating this to MPs and the press and ask how they should deal with this so that she can come up with a proposal. Simon agreed and mentioned Sarah is a front bencher at the council now and is also a ward councillor. Simon also suggested arranging a meeting for next week Tuesday if they get a response from NHG by Friday.
- 4.13. Jackie raised that her main concern is those in Phase 4 who have to move either to Phase 3 or off the estate in two weeks time. They do not have the luxury of choice that Phase 5 residents have. Simon added that if enough people turn to Hackney and say that it is too expensive to stay at Woodberry Down and would rather move elsewhere in the borough, they would struggle to empty the phase on time considering the amount of housing available in Hackney. Simon suggested that WDCO could highlight this to Sarah at the meeting as Hackney have a massive homelessness problem and would not want to have existing social rent tenants to move to other homes in the borough. This would only further increase their homelessness costs in temporary accommodation.
- 4.14. William inquired if Omar, Shifra, and Liv would be interested in discussing the matter with the councillor, who would be available for a conversation on Saturday with 2-3 people. Omar agreed and requested Shifra and Liv to attend as well. However, Simon suggested reconsidering holding the meeting on Saturday since the WDCO Awayday is scheduled for the same day. Omar proposed involving the new head of Woodberry Down in the discussion.
- 4.15. Omar also raised concerns about Hackney's reluctance to propose solutions, highlighting that they are constrained by the joint venture agreement. He explained the joint venture between Hackney, NHG, and Berkeley, which governs the development of Phases 3-8. He noted that the joint venture includes financial commitments, such as funds allocated for social housing and shared ownership, which are tied to contractual obligations.
- 4.16. Omar emphasised that WDCO's cost-saving efforts on the service charge—amounting to approximately £190,000-£200,000 per phase—could total nearly £1 million over five years. These savings, however, are not being factored into NHG's accounts, and every reduction in costs represents a financial impact on NHG, which may be influencing their reluctance to offer solutions.
- 4.17. Simon asked if they should invite an officer and councillor to the meeting and suggested leaving this to Sarah to decide if she wants an officer at the meeting. Simon suggested inviting Susanne as an officer as she will take a strategic view and will have greater knowledge of the finances of Woodberry Down and the housing issue for the borough.

ACTION: Simon will email Sarah to arrange a meeting on Tuesday 14th January at 6pm at the WDCO office to discuss Phase 3 costs and how the council will support WDCO to ensure Phase 3 is affordable to working people, as per the promises originally made.

ACTION: Omar will get Shifra and Liv to attend the meeting on Tuesday 14th January.

5. January Board Agenda

- 5.1. At the moment, the agenda includes Phase 3 Community Space, Rent/Affordability of Phase 3, and Partner Updates.
- 5.2. Jackie suggested adding feedback from the Awayday to the agenda as some Board members will not be present.

ACTION: Simon will draft the agenda and circulate to the Executives to review before circulating to the Board.

6. AOB: