

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

- a. At a Public Cabinet meeting held on 1 December 2014 the Administration approved the formation of a Residents' Commission on Council Housing (RCCH) to consider the options for empowering residents to take local control over their homes and for maximising investment in existing and new council homes.
- b. The RCCH was established independently of the Council and the majority of its membership was made up of tenants and leaseholders whose homes were owned or managed under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- c. At a Public Cabinet meeting on 7 December 2015 the RCCH submitted the Residents Commission Report (the Report) which recommended that the Council transfer the ownership of HRA stock to a Community Gateway Association.
- d. The Government has indicated that it will not write off the Council's HRA debt following such a stock transfer. The Administration's goal remains to implement the recommendations of the RCCH but given the lack of Government support it must also consider alternatives.
- e. The Defend Council Homes Unit (DCHU) has been established to build on the work of the RCCH and explore alternatives to the transfer of the Council's HRA stock to a Community Gateway Association.

2. Membership

- a. The DCHU shall initially comprise 3 members, being 1 resident member, and 2 independent members.
- b. The DCHU and the Council may jointly decide to invite other individuals to be members but it is agreed that in order to maintain its independent voice the DCHU shall not include officers and/or elected Councillors. Officers and elected Councillors may still attend DCHU meetings, by invitation, to support DCHU.
- c. No one member will act for or claim to represent the other members in public without prior agreement of the DCHU.

3. Chair

- a. The Chair of DCHU will be confirmed at the first meeting of DCHU under these Terms of Reference.
- b. The Chair may delegate responsibilities to individual members for specific tasks.

4. Terms of Reference

- a. The provision of affordable, quality homes in places where people are proud to live is at the heart of the Council's vision. The DCHU has been established specifically to ensure that the Council's existing housing stock (HRA stock)

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is subject to appropriate safeguards such that it can continue to be a major part of such provision in the Borough [of Hammersmith & Fulham].

- b. On the basis that the RCCH's recommendation to transfer the HRA stock to a Community Gateway Association is unlikely to be achieved in the near future, DCHU will explore the options which remain open to the Council to achieve its strategic objectives. Such options will be evaluated against the "key messages" of the RCCH as set out in the Report, DCHU will therefore consider whether the options have the potential to:
 - i. safeguard council homes and estates for the future;
 - ii. give residents greater control over their homes;
 - iii. protect tenants' rights and keep rents and service charges at levels residents can afford; and
 - iv. fund improvements to homes and housing services.
- c. DCHU will, with the assistance of external advisers, closely focus on the legal and financial viability of any HRA stock option explored.
- d. In evaluating HRA stock options, DCHU will consider how to engage with and involve residents and key stakeholders in order to include their views in the most effective ways.
- e. DCHU is non-partisan. This is why its membership will not include Council officers or Councillors and it will analyse HRA options independently of the Council. Nevertheless, DCHU will be supported by the Council, both practically and financially. Should DCHU's activities conflict with these Terms of Reference, the Council will be entitled to reconsider its support. The Council will not withdraw its support from DCHU without first providing the Chair with notice of any matter which it considers to be in conflict with the Terms of Reference and an opportunity for DCHU to remedy such matter (if it is remediable).
- f. DCHU will report its findings and proposed solutions to the leader of the Council.

5. Advisers

- a. DCHU will itself lead in the production of information, progress reports and other tasks. The DCHU shall however be entitled to seek support from officers and invite advisers to attend any meetings of DCHU and/or produce written advice.
- b. The Council must approve the identity of those advisors and (unless expressly within the agreed budget) the cost of this advice.

6. Meetings

- a. DCHU shall meet as and when required whether in person or by means of conference call [but at least once per month] and the date, time, and place of DCHU's meetings shall be agreed by the Chair in consultation with the Council's supporting officer.

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7. Confidentiality

- a. In order to carry out its work the DCHU may need access to information which is confidential.
- b. DCHU must comply with any reasonable Council stipulations as to non-disclosure of such confidential information.

8. Reporting

- a. DCHU will produce a report which will be made publicly available on completion of its work.
- b. Interim reports may be made to relevant residents' groups and forums as necessary.

9. Expenses etc.

- a. Members of the DCHU may claim reasonable travel expenses and reasonably incurred child care costs which should be submitted on a monthly basis to [the Council's supporting officer]. The Council will reimburse the receipted travel costs where the total reimbursed does not exceed the equivalent cost of standard class public transport.
- b. Any other costs must be expressly within the agreed budget or agreed with the Council before they are incurred.

10. Variations

- a. Variations of these Terms of Reference shall require a decision of the DCHU and approval of the Council.

11. Policy compliance

- a. DCHU will comply with the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, as well as other relevant policies as required.

30 May 2017