



## **Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC) response to the Borough and Governance Review Recommendations - 25 April 2019**

### **Background**

KCSC has engaged with RBKC's Governance Review since its inception. Prior to this, we have worked in partnership with the Volunteer Centre Kensington and Chelsea to support the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Democracy Society to engage with local people and the voluntary and community sector in its review of the RBKC's governance and decision-making structures. We have facilitated discussions through KCSC's Grenfell Network Group meetings, submitted collective responses as the review has progressed, and attended and contributed to the Panel's open meetings.

### **Overview**

Whilst acknowledging some useful steps recommended by the Panel, we feel its response falls short of the expectations raised by Councillor Campbell's first speech as Leader –

*"We need to change and to change fundamentally if we are ever to regain the trust of you, our community."*

RBKC's commitment to fundamental change, including a move towards full resident participation and empowerment (not just for North Kensington, but the whole Borough) needs to be seen as well as heard. We believe that whilst there are some important steps being taken by the council, we feel it falls short of what we had hoped in terms of a shift towards full resident participation and empowerment.

### **Response to the recommendations**

The Centre for Public Scrutiny report proposed 12 key principles that should guide the future of local decision-making and accountability, these were:

1. Connecting with residents
2. Focusing on what matters
3. Listening to every voice
4. Acting with integrity
5. Involving before deciding
6. Communicating what we're doing
7. Inviting residents to take part
8. Being clearly accountable
9. Responding fairly to everyone's needs
10. Working as a team
11. Managing responsibly
12. Having the support we need

It is important to see the Panel's recommendations mapped against each of these principles, as it gives one indication of RBKC's commitment to implement them in its decision-making.

We believe that, as part of the process of establishing trust in the Council, it will help if local people and organisations are able to see RBKC's programme of change, including changes

to governance, externally evaluated at the end of the first year. An objective and substantive assessment of the extent to which the recommendations lead to positive change will help RBKC and residents find common ground on which to discuss their impact.

We welcome **Recommendation 3.2** for the proposed constitutional change to reflect RBKC's commitment to public participation, and that it is reviewed every 4 years alongside the Council Plan. This Participation Strategy should be a standalone document, detailing how public participation will be practised, governed by key principles.

The recommendations do not speak to this year's Civil Society inquiry. The inquiry report makes its own recommendation based on a shared PACT between the state and community institutions, including:

- **Power** - *consciously shifting power in big ways, sharing more decision-making and control, being a model for the rest of society and doing whatever is needed so that everyone can play a full part in the things which matter to them.*
- **Accountability** - *holding ourselves accountable first and foremost to the communities and people we exist to serve, revolutionising our approach – including being more accountable to each other and to future generations.*
- **Connection** - *broadening and deepening our connections with people and communities – especially when it's hardest – for this is the heart of civil society's purpose, bridging the frequent divides that span our society and investing in a new social infrastructure for civil society.*
- **Trust** - *devoting the time and resources necessary to building trust – our core currency and foundation – earning trust by staying true to our values and standing up for them and trusting others with vital decisions that affect them.*

More information about the PACT can be found [here](#). Adopting these recommendations would help RBKC make a fundamental shift in power between itself and the people it works for, acting as a template to demonstrate its commitment to public participation and show how this will be delivered.

We feel strongly that there is not time for adequate discussion of a draft before going to Full Council this July for decision. As a key document in the process of change, focused on increasing the influence of local people over decision-making, there must be the widest possible participation by resident groups, voluntary and community organisations and the community generally. We suggest an iterative process, with the chance for an interim redraft so a further Council cycle should be allowed, with agreement of the final document by September or October 2019.

**Recommendation 3.3** whilst sound, does not show how the change to the constitution on involving local people can be truly tested.

Our previous submissions to the Panel have advocated for a change that ensures residents and their organisations are an inclusive part of the decision-making structures. Residents must be at the heart of deciding their own futures, working within a coherent framework based on the priorities identified by the many RBKC exercises undertaken since the fire – A Journey of Recovery being the most robust. Other models put forward differ in the depth of participation, but the principles are the same, and encompass not just co-design and co-production of RBKC services, but real influence over the priorities of other key stakeholders such as the NHS and the police. This fosters an environment of more independent residents, while emphasising collective responsibility between local people and the institutions that serve them.

The Panel's recommendations should have opened up opportunities for semi-autonomous local decision-making (whether based on delegation or election) with significant budgets

(based on models already working in London and elsewhere), and to support neighbourhood forums, for example as in St Helens. City Living Local Life (**Recommendation 3.4**) is not designed to encourage collective decision making at ward/neighbourhood level and to foster this approach. Instead it relies heavily on Councillors and appears to put additional pressure on them to co-ordinate their activities to consult even more. However, consultation is an alternative to participation, not a step towards it.

North Kensington, complex in nature with multiplying factors of deprivation, inequality and recovery from a very traumatic event, will see these recommendations as business as usual. Our previous submissions suggested that the relevant test of the Panel's recommendations is how new arrangements would have made a material difference to the process of over-riding local people and organisations that contributed to the fire. We offered a set of principles and one way of delivering on them to address that test. The Panel's recommendations will not meet the needs of this area or that test. They increase reliance on Councillors, who are expected to play the key role in what should be a community development function, though their main role should be to deliver appropriate political challenge.

In relation to **Recommendation 3.5** local people need a system in which appropriate scrutiny can take place and residents, whatever their views of political parties, feel confident that their views are being adequately represented. The proposed structure may minimise this. Whatever system is in place, the voice of the most marginalised must be heard and acted upon by decision-makers. To do otherwise fails to harness the strengths of local people to improve their lives and those of everyone in the Borough.

In relation to **Recommendations 3.8 and 3.9** the proposal as we understand it would reduce 'Key Decisions' for Leadership Group attention from some 200 a year to 70/80 (App.3 para.3.1). KCSC would question what evidence there is from the council that 120/130 exempted KDs would all be of low interest to the public. We would argue that this is as much about how information is communicated to the public as it is about the number of key decisions. We believe delegation to officers is unreasonable and particularly given if the decision was to have a much localised impact eg a facility is threatened with closure where this would only principally affect one ward and so would be excluded as a Key Decision under the criteria proposed.

In relation to **Recommendation 3.12** on communication with representative organisations, we suggest strongly that a participative, public process is followed, when RBKC has done its research on Residents Associations, on who it will regard as representative bodies.

### **In summary**

We believe that local people will feel that the recommendations do not reflect the radical changes expected following the public commitment to fundamental change made on behalf of RBKC by the Leader of the Council. Whilst the Panel recommends some modest changes, we believe it should go much further to deliver real and meaningful long-term change.

Potential alternative models were considered throughout this process and we request that RBKC provide a summarised assessment of those models and look at where other approaches could be tested throughout the year.

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