

6 DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING SPEECH

I was invited to contribute because of my experience of the current governance system since 2000, [through the Kensington Society, Chelsea Society, and the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council]. The views are my own, which I offer as a **critical friend**. You may find some of comments harsh, but please take them in the spirit intended. I want you to succeed. I, like most residents, want you to aspire to being an excellent Council.

Grenfell was a massive tragedy, a massive challenge, but it should also be a **wake-up call to rethink the Council's mission and values, and the relationships between the Council and our communities.**

The Leader's July speech recognised that the Council must change. But it will take much more than a change in leadership and changes to the internal structure of the Council.

It will need a **change in governance arrangements**, but above all, in external relationships. Three major changes are needed:

- **a new relationship between the Council and our communities – a new social contract with residents;**
- **greater openness, transparency and accountability – to enable not only members and residents to get access to information, be consulted, but also to be engaged and be able to shape decisions – this will involve a change in governance; and**
- **a new culture of community engagement – early engagement, opportunities to contribute, and indeed to co-design policies and programmes that directly affect us.**

This will require new resources, new skills and, above all, a new organisational culture.

We need a new declaration of the Council's mission and values – putting community at the heart of the Council's vision.

We need a step change in the right direction – to move away from doing things **to** or even **for** communities – it must be **with** the community. Paternalism is now unacceptable.

I am addressing this comment to both members and officers. Sometimes of you still come across as proud, arrogant and aloof. You see yourself as in power, but, as servants of the community, you need to show more humility. You have an articulate electorate. We are not children – you need to learn to trust us and work both **for** us and **with** us. You must learn how to listen and let go.

I have been asked to address community engagement, governance and scrutiny.

Community Engagement:

There should be lessons from past, such as:

- **Estate renewal:** These are examples of a kind of arrogance – playing monopoly with people’s lives. How did anybody – members or officers – think they could do it?
- The entire process needs to be revisited - these types of changes need early and continuous engagement, working **with** local residents.
- **Disposal of community assets** have been seen purely as property management matter rather as stewards of the family silver?

Policy Change: We know it takes a lot of time and effort to get changes in policy, such as pub protection, basement, control of construction work and housing mix

Some of these really did engage the community – lessons could be learnt – yes, it takes a bit more effort, but it delivers much better solutions.

Planning:

When it comes to planning, officers negotiate with developers before residents are aware of a proposed development

- Pre-application advice – opportunity to increase or lose potential public benefits – risk of officers being captured by developers
- Residents engaged far too late in the process

We need to ensure that there is genuine early engagement with the community. We need to redesign the process.

Need for direct engagement:

Council needs:

- **a complete review of how it engages the community in developing policies and proposals**
- **a social contract to raise the level of community engagement**
- **for major developments Council must engage the community before the main aspects of the development are “agreed” – otherwise too late**

Governance

Key Decisions:

The Leader and Cabinet system has meant that many decisions went completely under the radar and even with key decisions:

- many have no consultation,
- often no reports available,
- few people understand the process or know they can object; and
- although more now get reported to a scrutiny committee, most are not scrutinised.

There are few opportunities for the public to make representations, to get Key Decisions requisitioned for scrutiny, let alone get them withdrawn.

Indeed, if you think this is impossible for the public to deal with, it is equally impenetrable for members. Fixing it for residents would also help members!

The key issue, however, through lack of involvement, **communities are unable to influence the outcome let alone help shape the decisions.**

Scrutiny

My experience of scrutiny has been Government Select Committees.

By comparison, RBKC scrutinies seem to be mainly reports by cabinet members, but nothing more challenging than a fireside chat. More recently they have been more investigative studies.

Changes needed:

- identify more problematic issues and take evidence from a wider range of external witnesses
- take on more co-opted members – even a consumer view – including on the Public Realm Scrutiny Committee. I note that Item 9 proposes co-optees on other scrutiny committees, but not this one

In summary, there is a need for major change

- **Complete change in community engagement**
- **New social contract with residents**
 - **Set out residents' rights & obligations, as well as opportunities**
 - **Set out Council's responsibilities**
 - **Greater/earlier community engagement**
- **Need to design new approach with the community**
- **A more transparent, open and responsive governance process**
- **A more effective and challenging scrutiny process, including co-opted residents/customers**

Finally, I understand that these issues will be covered by your consultants, but as and when recommendations are received, please, as a first sign of the change in practice, engage with the community to discuss the options to make an input to your final decision.