

# Transparency Consultation

## Interim findings

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# Overview



- Aim of consultation: to explore views about transparency to inform the work of the Commission and to facilitate improvement.
- The consultation explored views about the following themes:
  - The extent to which the Council **keeps residents informed** about what it does, what it spends and how decisions are made.
  - Views about the **quality of information** provided.
  - Views around how effectively, and openly, the Council **engages and consults** with residents.
  - Open comments invited on all areas and residents asked for suggestions for improvement.

# Responses to date (as at 21.09.15)



- Online consultation: ran from 17th August – 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015. Staff were also invited to provide views.
- 164 responses: 118 residents (& others) and 46 staff:

Respondent type	Number	
<b>TOTAL responses</b>	<b>164</b>	
Tower Hamlets resident / individual	94	} Residents & others = 118
Organisation or business	5	
Other	4	
Prefer not to say/unknown	15	
LBTH staff	46	Staff

- The consultation has been extended to provide Community Champions further time to respond.

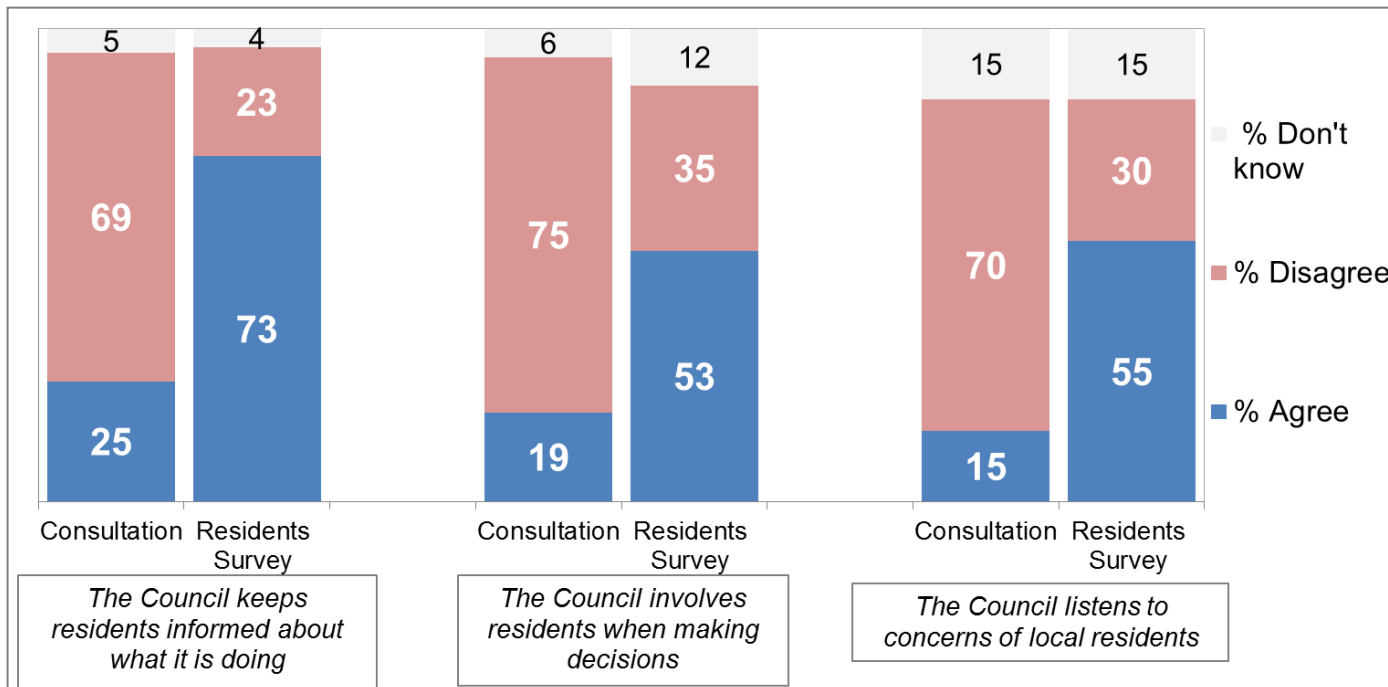
# Interpretation of the results



- In considering the results that follow, it is important to remember that this was a consultation exercise, not a 'scientific' survey.
- The views and experiences of the 118 residents who responded are not necessarily representative of the views of all residents. Similarly, the views of the 46 staff who responded are unlikely to be representative of the views of all Council staff.
- Nevertheless, the results provide some insight into the nature of perceptions around the topics of transparency, information and resident engagement.
- Staff were generally more positive than resident respondents

# Views compared: Consultation views vs. Annual Residents' Survey results 2014-15

- Results from the Council's Annual Residents' Survey suggest residents are more positive generally on issues around resident engagement compared to those who responded to the consultation.
- Survey data also show that the views of Tower Hamlets residents are similar to the views of Londoners generally – on the subject of resident engagement.



Source: Tower Hamlets Council Transparency Consultation (18 August-18 September 2015); TNS-BRMB Tower Hamlets Residents Survey 2014-15 (note: the survey is based on face to face interviews with 1,227 residents chosen to be representative of the Tower Hamlets population).

## **Findings:**

### **Views of residents (118 respondents)**

# How well the Council keeps residents informed

The majority of respondents felt that the Council does not keep residents well informed about: its activities, how it spends money, and how decisions are made:

- 82 respondents felt that the Council does not keep residents informed about **what it is doing**;
- 92 respondents felt that the Council does not keep residents informed about **how it spends its money**;
- 91 respondents felt that the Council does not keep residents informed about **how decisions are made**;
- 89 residents felt that the Council is not **transparent and open** about its activities.

# Transparency:

## written comments – some themes

- Perception that there is a lack of transparency generally, but especially in relation to:
  - Council finances (eg spending, contracts, grant funding/allocation);
  - Information about **planning decisions** and applications.
- There is also a recognition that the Council is in a period of **transition**. For some, a feeling of tentative optimism.



# Quality of information provided

- Views fairly mixed about the quality of information on website.
- Areas for improvement include:
  - financial matters,
  - consultation information
  - council policies and performance and;
  - decision making.

# Information:

## written comments – some themes

- Lack of awareness about what **information** is available and how to access it.
- **Council website**: considered to be difficult to use. Respondents reported that it was difficult to find the right information and that information was often out of date, or difficult to understand.
- Information about **planning applications and decisions** felt to be difficult to navigate/access.
- **East End Life: views mixed** – some find it a very useful resource and say it the only way they get information, while others felt it was a waste of money, or that content was lacking / partisan.

# Better information: written comments

- Examples of the sort of information respondents would like to see more of:
  - Council finances: budgets, spending, grants etc
  - Planning matters: applications and decisions.
  - Contact details: staff numbers, responsibilities, structure plans.
  - Housing information eg major works, allocations.
  - Contract terms and performance of contractors.
  - Updates on what has happened in response to the previous allegations against the Council.

# Views about engagement and consultation

- The majority of respondents felt the Council does not engage with residents effectively:
  - 88 respondents felt the Council does **not** involve residents when making decisions;
  - 80 respondents felt the Council does **not** listen to concerns of local residents.
  - 84 respondents felt that the Council is **not** open and transparent when conducting consultations.
  - 89 respondents felt that the Council does **not** keep residents informed about how their involvement has made a difference.

# Consultation and Engagement: written comments – some themes

- Consultations perceived to be tokenistic - view that Council has already made up its mind and does not listen to views.
- Lack of feedback on consultation findings and what has happened as a result.
- Some felt consultations were rushed / not well managed.
- Engagement sometimes perceived to be selective: 'usual suspects' consulted. Vocal minority.

# Consultation and Engagement: written comments – some themes

Resident suggestions to improve consultation and engagement:

- More direct engagement needed – not just online. More pro-active and targeted approaches to engaging/briefing those who will be affected (eg community events, open forums, issues based events, targeted leaflets/material).
- Creative use of social media and digital opportunities.
- Better publicity to promote consultations.
- Better planning eg material ahead of time, longer consultation periods, venues/times carefully considered, better information and feedback.
- More public involvement needed in meetings, Q&A sessions with members and officers.

## Next steps



- Findings to inform the Transparency Commission recommendations
- Feedback to participants about what has happened
- Mayor's Transparency Protocol, Communications Review and new Community Engagement strategy will also address many of these issues
- New questions on transparency and trust considered for the Annual Residents Survey
- Monitoring perceptions around these issues, and assessing progress over time