

THE FUTURE OF SERVICES FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN COUNCIL HOMES – CONSULTATION REPORT

1. Summary

- 1.1 The council conducted a consultation on the future of services for people living in council homes between 24 October and 18 December 2022.
- 1.2 86.21% of people who participated in the survey agreed that housing management services should be brought back in-house.
- 1.3 There was a high response rate to the survey with 12% of residents of tenants and leaseholders participating.
- 1.4 Over 150 people provided qualitative feedback via drop-in sessions, webinars, emails and on paper.
- 1.5 People who provided qualitative feedback were generally supportive of the Council's proposals and provided comments and suggestions on what is important in services in the future, resident engagement, the transition period and how services are now.
- 1.6 Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) board members and Tenants and Resident Association (TRA) members also provided feedback, suggestions, and comments in addition to those of residents.
- 1.7 1,444 people are interested in being further involved in the future of services.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This report sets out the methodology and responses for the consultation on the future of housing management services.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 Between 24 October and 18 December 2022, the Council ran a consultation on the future of housing management services.
- 3.2 The consultation aimed to test the opinion of stakeholders (predominately council tenants, leaseholders, and freeholders) on two options:
 - To bring housing management services back in house under the direct control of the council (preferred option)
 - To extend the council's management agreement with THH

- 3.3 A mixed method approach was used which included collecting stakeholders' views and feedback via a survey, drop-in events, a dedicated email address, information webinars and a focus group with THH's Board.

4. Methodology

4.1 Consultation methodology and design

- 4.1.1 During the consultation methodology and material design process, the project group consulted with a range of stakeholders, both relating to the content of the consultation pack and the way in which the consultation was executed. Benchmarking was also carried out in relation to other local authorities' consultations on bringing back their ALMO.
- 4.1.2 The programme team led a consultation project group which included representatives from THH. The project group were advised by THH engagement officers to inform the method of consulting with residents, leading to a consultation session with the THH Residents' Panel, who played a significant role in shaping the consultation materials. The programme team also consulted with THH when developing the calendar of drop-in sessions, ensuring that there was a good spread of locations around the borough, near estates.
- 4.1.3 Additionally, the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee also provided input into the consultation methodology and materials.
- 4.1.4 The programme team contacted Equalities Hub groups, including the Ethnic Minority Hub, the LGBT Forum, the Older People's Reference Group, the Disabled People's Network and the Tower Hamlets Inter-Faith Forum to inform the consultation methodology and materials. Not all these groups responded, however the programme team received advice from the Older People's Reference Group in relation to strategies to include older residents, and also worked with the Disabled People's Network to produce an Easy Read copy of the consultation.

4.2 Consultation pack and survey

- 4.2.1 The consultation pack included a letter from the Mayor, background information about the consultation and why it is happening, FAQs, a calendar of drop-in events and webinars, the survey and a Freepost envelope. It was delivered by post to the correspondence address of every named tenant and leaseholder. Each consultation pack was addressed to the individual by name, and each survey was marked with an individual ID code, to ensure responses were only received by tenants and leaseholders and multiple responses were not counted.
- 4.2.2 Respondents were provided with the option to return the consultation by post or to complete online, and the full consultation pack was also available on the webpage Let's Talk Tower Hamlets. Also available on this

webpage were translated, Easy Read and Large Print copies of the consultation. Where responses were returned by post, they were inputted into the Let's Talk Tower Hamlets system by the programme team and once processed, sealed in an envelope, initialled, and dated. This meant that all the data was held in the same location and could be analysed in totality. The full consultation pack arrived by first class post on the 24 October 2022, the same date that the Let's Talk Tower Hamlets webpage went live. At the mid-point of the consultation, a reminder letter (with the tenants' and leaseholders' unique reference code included in case this had been lost) was sent to all tenants and leaseholders.

4.2.3 The consultation period lasted for eight weeks, with a range of events taking place. The consultation closed on the 18 December 2022, after which no further submissions were accepted.

4.3 Engagement events

4.3.1 During the consultation period, a total of twenty-five engagement events took place. This included twenty-three drop-in sessions and two online information webinars.

4.3.2 Residents were invited to attend and share their views, ask any questions or receive support in participating in the consultation. Idea Store staff were also briefed on how to provide support to residents to participate.

4.3.3 The drop-in sessions were held in local community centres, community hubs and TRA (Tenant and Resident Association) halls, at a range of locations in the borough. Care was also taken to hold these sessions at a range of times, to accommodate residents' working hours or other responsibilities.

4.3.4 Both information webinars took place in the evening. Although the first was mostly to deliver information, the second webinar was an open question and answer session. While communication regarding events was mainly targeted at tenants and leaseholders, attendance was open to all, and the drop-in sessions also received visits from other stakeholders who had an interest in the future of housing management services. Where specific issues were raised by residents at drop-in sessions, these were forwarded on to THH or the relevant council service.

4.4 Dedicated email address

4.4.1 A dedicated email address (talk.housingmanagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk) was set up so that residents could ask for further information or share their views. Approximately half of the 54 emails received were to discuss the consultation and share feedback and suggestions, and these were responded to by the programme team. The other half relating to the consultation were information requests (such as for translated copies of the materials) which the programme team responded to.

4.5 Increasing accessibility and gathering views of those seldom heard

4.5.1 The programme team aimed to ensure that the consultation was accessible to as many participants and groups of people as possible. A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken during the design stages to assess impact and access for different groups, and how barriers to participation could be overcome.

4.5.2 The programme team implemented the following measures to mitigate any barriers to participation:

- Consultation pack was translated into the top 5 community languages and available online, in Idea Stores and by post
- Consultation pack was sent out to all tenants and leaseholders by post
- Consultation pack was available online
- Consultation pack was available at Mulberry Place and at Idea Stores within the borough on request
- Engagement officers with proficiency in the top community languages attended pop-up events, webinars, Idea Stores and other engagement events to support participation
- Equalities Hub groups (Ethnic Minority Hub, the LGBT Forum, the Older People's Reference Group, the Disabled People's Network and the Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum) were contacted before and during the consultation to promote awareness on how this information can be found in an appropriate language/format, where people could access additional support, and how to participate in the consultation
- Drop-in sessions were held at community centres, community hubs and TRA halls to engage residents who are unable to access the consultation online or who need additional help
- Two online webinars were delivered to inform residents about the consultation and to answer any questions
- An Easy Read and Large Print version of the consultation pack was available online and by post at request
- Significant religious practices/holidays were researched to ensure there was no clash between these and any engagement events
- Events were scheduled at a variety of different dates and times and at range of locations across the borough.

5. Participation and responses

5.1 The following responses were received during the consultation:

- 3,190 people responded to the survey¹ (12% of tenants and leaseholders).
- 104 people attended drop-in sessions and information webinars.
- 54 emails were received to provide feedback on the consultation.
- 1,444 people expressed an interest in being further involved in the future of services for people living in council homes.

5.2 Response rate

- 5.2.1 A 12% response rate is consistent with the average response rate for other local authorities who have recently consulted on bringing their ALMO back in-house (e.g., London Borough of Haringey and Manchester City Council).
- 5.2.2 The response rate meets research and statistical principles required to assure the council that the survey results are reasonably valid and reliable, and that the sample of 3,190 participants are representative of all tenants and leaseholders.
- 5.2.3 This is calculated by determining the population size, confidence interval and confidence level.

Table 1 – Population size, confidence interval and confidence level

Population size	26,796	Total no. of tenants, leaseholders and freeholders able to complete the survey
Confidence interval	3	The margin of error used to establish the range of values that a result would fall within if the population was sampled again. The standard value for this is 3. In this case, a confidence interval of 3 would predict that 83-89% (86% plus or minus 3) of participants would support the proposals to bring services back in house if the survey was repeated.
Confidence level	95%	The probability that the set of values (as established by the confidence interval) is also true for the population. 95% is a standard rate for survey data.

- 5.2.4 The sample size of survey participants required to ensure that confidence can be gained from any response to a question is: 1,026 participants.
- 5.2.5 Therefore, it can be concluded the sample size of 3,190 was considerably higher than what is required according to research and statistical principles to be sure that if the survey was repeated in the population, that the same results would be replicated if the survey was repeated, with between 83

¹ 183 responses were discounted due to use of either an invalid or duplicated unique reference code

and 89% of participants supporting proposals to bring services back in-house.

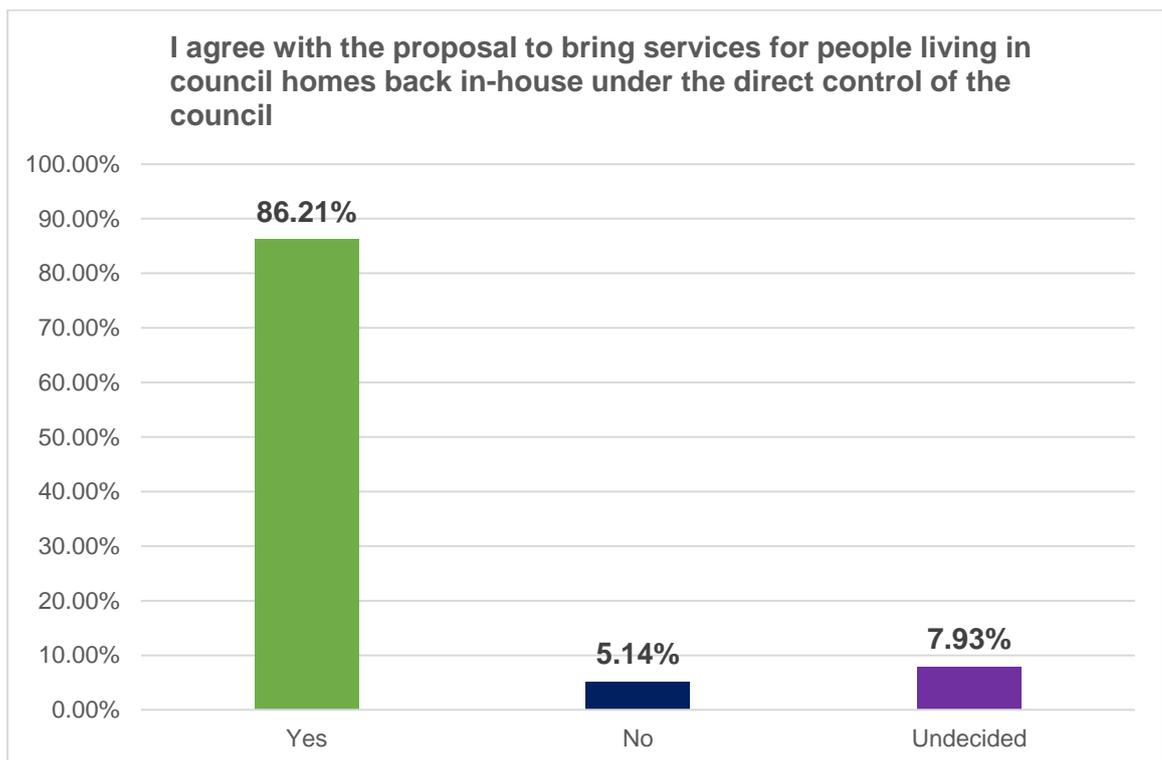
5.2.6 Further, the confidence interval for a sample of 3,190 (population size 26,750 and confidence level 95%) is 1, meaning that the council can be reasonably sure that should the same survey be conducted with tenants and leaseholders, between 85% and 87% would support the proposal to bring services back in-house under the direct control of the council.

6. Survey results

6.1 Response to the proposal to bring services back in-house.

6.1.2 86.21% of participants agreed that housing management services should be brought back in-house under direct control of the council, with 5.91% of participants disagreeing with this option and 7.93% undecided.

Graph 1: Responses to: I agree with the proposal to bring services for people living in council homes back in-house under the direct control of the council



6.2 Responses from different stakeholder groups

Table 2: Participation of stakeholder groups and their response to the proposal to bring services back in-house

Stakeholder group	Tenant	Leaseholder	Private tenant of a leaseholder	Other
Percentage of participants within stakeholder group	64.58%	31.47%	0.25%	1.5%
Percentage of stakeholder group <u>agreeing</u> with proposal	89.42%	85.97%	83.33%	86.05%
Percentage of stakeholder group <u>disagreeing</u> with proposal	2.96%	3.61%	0%	9.30%
Percentage of stakeholder group <u>undecided</u>	7.62%	10.41%	16.67%	4.65%

6.3 Response to statements checking understanding of respondents

6.3.1 91.54% of residents found the information provided to them useful and easy to understand.

6.3.2 95.89% understood that their rent, service charge and tenancy or lease agreement will not be affected as a result of any changes from the proposals discussed in the consultation.

6.4 Protected characteristics and equalities questions

6.4.1 There was representation across all protected characteristics in terms of survey participation. Responses from all groups followed the general response trend when asked about the proposal to bring services back in-house, indicating that there was not any group with protected characteristics which felt differently to the general population about the proposals.

Table 3: Participant responses to equalities questions (percentage of respondents identifying for each group)

Number of years living in a Tower Hamlets Council home				
0 – 6 years	7 – 10 years	10 – 15 years	15+ years	No response
10%	11%	12%	59%	8%

How old are you?										
0 – 15	16 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65 – 74	75 – 84	85+	Prefer not to say	No response
0%	1%	7%	18%	23%	20%	16%	8%	3%	3%	3%

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted or expected to last, at least 12 months?			
Yes	No	Prefer not to say	No response
30%	55%	10%	4%

Type of health problem or disability							
Sensory impairment	Physical impairment	Learning disability	Mental health condition	Long-standing illness or health condition	Prefer not to say	Prefer to self-describe	No response
5%	9%	3%	10%	14%	15%	8%	53%

What best describes your gender?				
Man	Woman	Prefer not to say	Prefer to self-describe	No response
46%	47%	3%	0%	4%

Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?			
Yes	No	Prefer not to say	No response
89%	1%	5%	5%

Which of the following describes your sex?					
Male	Female	Intersex	Prefer not to say	Prefer to self-describe	No response
45%	47%	0%	4%	0%	4%

Are you legally married or in a civil partnership?			
Yes	No	Prefer not to say	No response
52%	33%	9%	6%

Which best describes your current marital, civil partnership or cohabitation status?	
Single	18%
Married	47%
In a registered civil partnership	0%
Separated, but still legally married	2%
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	0%
Divorced	6%
Formerly in a registered civil partnership which is now dissolved	0%
Widowed	8%
Surviving partner from a registered civil partnership	0%
Cohabiting with a partner	3%
Prefer not to say	10%
No response	4%

Are you currently pregnant or did you give birth in the last twelve months?			
Yes	No	Prefer not to say	No response
1%	84%	5%	9%

How would you describe your ethnic group?		
White	British (English, Scottish, Northern Irish, Welsh)	27.37%
	Irish	1.76%

	Traveller of Irish heritage	0%
	Gypsy/Roma	0%
	Any other White background	5.8%
Mixed	White and Black Caribbean	0.25%
	White and Black African	0.56%
	White and Asian	0.91%
	Any other Mixed background	0.72%
Asian/Asian British	Indian	1.60%
	Pakistani	0.75%
	Bangladeshi	41.9%
	Any other Asian background	1.07%
Black/Black British	Somali	2.51%
	Other African	3.01%
	Caribbean	1.76%
	Any other Black background	0.41%
Other ethnic group	Chinese	1.13%
	Vietnamese	0.38%
	Any other background	1.03%
Prefer not to say		3.98%
No response		4.89%

What is your religion or belief?	
No religion or belief	9%
Agnostic	1%
Muslim	42%
Christian	19%
Jewish	1%
Buddhist	1%
Sikh	0.16%
Hindu	1%
Humanist	0.41%
Prefer not to say	6%
Prefer to self-describe	1%
No response	20%

Which of the following describes your sexual orientation?					
Gay/lesbian	Bisexual	Heterosexual/straight	Prefer not to say	Prefer to self-describe	No response
2%	1%	73%	19%	1%	10%

Do you have caring or parenting responsibilities?			
Yes	No	Prefer not to say	No response
31%	54%	8%	6%

7 Qualitative analysis – feedback themes

7.1 Feedback, comments and questions provided by respondents (via attendance at drop-in sessions, information webinars, email or through postal surveys) were compiled and analysed. The analysis below sets out the themes found in qualitative responses and comments within these themes.

7.2 **Theme 1: Consultation options – bringing services back in-house or extension of the management agreement**

7.2.1 In terms of the options set out, most people expressed support for housing management services coming back in-house. There was a feeling that this change would improve services and help the council deliver on its objectives. In terms of financial management, some people felt that the council would have more resources than THH and it would be easier for it to manage a budget. Many felt that THH is too expensive and bringing it in-house could result in better value for money. Others identified efficiencies that could be achieved by insourcing, including the potential for the council to integrate services which are currently duplicated between itself and THH. Some also felt that bringing services in-house would provide clarity in terms of governance structures and communication – making it easier to hold the council accountable as the landlord. Bringing THH in-house was also seen to be more democratic as the executive could be elected, whereas THH Board members were seen to be self-appointed.

7.2.2 A minority of residents, however, thought that services should stay with THH, due to THH's expertise. One resident suggested that the council is in a strong negotiating position if THH are not performing. Residents were also keen for any changes to make a difference to their real-life experience, particularly in terms of performance and service delivery. They wanted to see a clear plan for continuous improvement within the council.

7.3 **Theme 2: How services should be provided if they come back in-house**

7.3.1 Residents gave feedback and suggestions on how services should be provided if they are brought in-house. They were strongly against any cuts in funding or staff and felt that rents, service charges, insurance and works charges should not increase. They wanted to see improvements in the performance monitoring and complaints response and suggested a dedicated team for this. Improved accountability and engagement with residents, as well as better communications between council services, would be welcomed. Although residents said it was important for expertise and knowledge of how to deliver services to be retained, there were concerns about a small number of staff currently in THH transferring over and what impact this would have on improving services. They wanted to understand how an in-house service would look within the council framework and if there would be a separate management team for these services.

7.4 Theme 3: Transition period

7.4.1 Residents discussed and gave comments on a potential transition period and said that action should be taken to maintain the same level of service and prevent disruption throughout, learning from other insourcing projects. Improvement of services should also be at the heart of the transition to justify the costs associated with this. There were also concerned that there should not be any delays to external works or decisions regarding major works and other capital expenditure. Finally, some residents highlighted the importance of considering migration/integration of data processing capabilities.

7.5 Theme 4: Consultation methodology

7.5.1 Some residents did not understand why equalities data was being collected. Others felt further information was needed on what performance improvement outcomes would be if services transferred in-house and felt the questionnaire could have been more complex.

7.6 Theme 5: Resident engagement

7.6.1 Residents provided a range of comments and suggestions on engagement and how this could be improved.

7.6.2 Many residents commented on TRAs, feeling they were useful but needed more support, and should be retained if services are brought back in-house. Residents spoke positively about the role of TRAs in attending meetings with police to address local issues and bringing residents from different backgrounds together, among much other valuable work. Although residents felt that THH were broadly supportive of TRAs and positively promoted them, some perceived that THH do not always recognise TRAs without clear explanation or that they recognise TRAs that some residents feel are not properly constituted or managed. There were also concerns that members of governance bodies, like TRAs, were handpicked by THH and there was not sufficient information about the work they had been doing. It was also felt that an umbrella federation of all TRAs coming together to work with the council and do community initiatives, as had existed previously, would be productive.

7.6.3 The Residents Panel was perceived to have been useful when first set up, as it was able to do service reviews, was fully funded, had its own administration, and produced several useful reports. However, residents were not sure what the function of the current Residents Panel was.

7.6.4 Some expressed that they would be interested in attending the Tenants and Leaseholders Housing Forum. Some highlighted it would be better attended and more productive if there was a strategic output, and it was attended by those who are accountable. Residents also felt that it was

crucial for any such initiative to function effectively and achieve objectives over an extended period, to prevent residents from feeling they had wasted their time.

7.6.5 Some residents said the community team had done good work and there was also an appetite for THH to actively support resident-led projects, such as helping people to declutter and improve their homes or delivering more gardening opportunities for the community. However, some residents wanted more clarity around the role of the resident engagement team.

7.6.6 Residents wanted better engagement from THH, including meeting in-person, returning phone calls or emails, responding to complaints and being transparent about governance. They wanted more opportunities to voice their opinions and be consulted on issues directly impacting their estate, including bike holders and the proximity of community centres to their homes, and wanted to be able to impact change where they lived. It was also emphasised that any engagement activity should recognise the fact that some residents face digital exclusion due to age or circumstance.

7.6.7 As well as providing general feedback on the options, how services could be provided if brought in-house, resident engagement and the transition period, residents also gave general comments about the current service, what needs to improve and how this might occur. These themes are summarised below in order of the amount of feedback received on these themes, with the themes with the most comments first.

7.7 Theme 6: Communicating and responding to issues & complaints

7.7.1 In terms of what needed to improve, residents frequently discussed THH's communication and responding to issues and complaints. Residents wanted to see improvement in the way THH engaged with them, feeling that there was not 'follow-up' and staff attitudes sometimes did not appear to recognise the gravity of their situation or demonstrate empathy. Some people said that they were regularly calling the contact number to ask for issues to be resolved, with little progress, and that they felt ignored. There was frustration around the inconsistency of email replies, difficulty in getting information about repairs and reporting them directly to the right person. Residents felt that the complaints system would operate more effectively if THH took ownership directly of answering complaints and ensuring issues were solved, instead of referring the customer to Mears. Some also highlighted the limitations of the online complaints system and expressed concerns that it was not accessible for older people or people without computers. There were also issues raised with staff working in the call centre, with some residents feeling that certain operators lacked customer service skills, while other operators were found to be helpful in resolving issues.

7.8 Theme 7: Repairs

7.8.1 Repairs was a frequent issue discussed by residents; with many highlighting specific problems they had experienced. It was perceived that the repairs service had worsened since the pandemic and some people proposed that a proactive system of monitoring repairs would be useful, with better governance, auditing and accountability. The repairs portal was not easy to use, in need of updating and some residents felt unheard and frustrated. Residents wanted THH staff to follow up on repairs for them, as had previously been the case, instead of being referred to Mears. Many found Mears frustrating to deal with, due to last-minute cancellations and poor communication, repairs not being done to a high enough standard or accidental damage occurring to peoples' homes during the visit. There were also concerns around inefficiency, with multiple visits sometimes being carried out for simple repairs. Residents suggested that where it was not possible to complete a repair in one visit, effective communication from Mears would greatly reduce their frustration at the issue (as they were often left not knowing what the next steps would be and when). Situations where urgent repairs were needed should be resolved as quickly as possible to prevent hazards developing. There was also a feeling that there should be further repairs done in addition to those completed as part of Decent Homes.

7.9 Theme 8: Condition of homes/estate

7.9.1 Residents discussed the conditions of their homes/estates and how this affected them. They suggested that stock management and cyclical works needs regular review. Although some felt their estate was generally satisfactory, others raised ongoing issues. Some residents complained that they were not satisfied with the environment on their estate, feeling that their blocks were not being cleaned thoroughly and fly tipping and rubbish on the street was a common issue and not dealt with swiftly enough. Others wanted replacement and/or better maintenance of trees. There were also reports that some homes had problems with pests, such as mice, cockroaches or bedbugs. Some gates and barriers had been repeatedly broken on estates and residents of one block wanted clarity on when scaffolding would be removed. There had also been issues with windows, water tanks and guttering, and it was important to residents that these were regularly cleaned and maintained. Some estates had mould issues and others suggested their bills would be greatly reduced by improved insulation in their homes. Residents of one estate also said they would feel reassured if a review into fire safety prevention was undertaken. Some suggested that more effort should be made to ensure the blocks were accessible to older people.

7.10 Theme 9: General comments about THH

7.10.1 Resident opinion was mixed on THH, with some feeling that service was poor, while others felt they received a good service. There were also some who felt that some areas are poor but there are positives. Some residents who had lived in their home for a long time recalled that THH had initially improved the service, however this was perceived to have declined during

the pandemic. Residents felt that increased visibility of THH staff on their estates would be helpful while others believed that THH are struggling and do not have enough staff/support. It was felt that because of this, in some customer-facing services, staff have low morale. Generally, residents wanted clarity around management structures within THH, and felt that communication between THH and the council needed improvement.

7.11 Theme 10: Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and crime

7.11.1 Residents reported ASB and crime on their estates, including drug dealing/taking especially from cars/Uber vehicles and illegal vehicles (including electric vehicles) that are parked or abandoned on estates. Fly-tipping, graffiti, burglary and intimidating behaviour was also prevalent. It was suggested some of this could be improved by more CCTV and better lighting on estates. There were also concerns around illegal subletting, and its impact on ASB, with some residents reporting that on certain estates, doors and gates were regularly broken to enable people to come and go without a key. Residents wanted a more streamlined customer journey for ASB, recommending that the three avenues for dealing with ASB should be reduced to one and there should be better follow-up to reports made by the ASB telephone line. One resident commented that the ASB team (in THH and Parkguard) is excellent.

7.12 Theme 11: Accountability and transparency

7.12.1 Many residents highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability, particularly in relation to governance, with some feeling that both THH and the council could do more work to improve on this. Some felt that the THH Board, as it was self-appointed, was an issue and there needed to be better ways to hold THH accountable and communicate its decision-making process to residents. This should involve better clarity and accountability on contractors/sub-contractors, and their remit. There should be specific people with responsibilities that residents can talk to and hold accountable. Residents also felt that information around THH budgets should be communicated in as accessible a way as possible, and there should be clear objectives and measurable outcomes for performance, bearing relevance to residents' real-life experience, against which the council can be held accountable. Performance and audit data needs to be clearer and accurate and scrutiny from residents should be included in the new council set up and/or in THH.

7.13 Theme 12: Leaseholder service charge/rents and charges

7.13.1 Especially given the current financial climate, residents wanted reassurance and commitment from the council that their rent, service charge, insurance and council tax would not increase.

7.13.2 Residents suggested that there should be more transparency on leasehold service charges, including a full break-down of how their service charge was calculated and independent information, such as

invoices or contracts to be provided on request. There should be better monitoring of works – several residents expressed concern that residents were being charged for work that had not been undertaken. It was also clear that there was confusion around which groups paid for what, and whether leaseholder service charge subsidised tenants.

- 7.13.3 Leaseholders also wanted reasoning for any increases in service charge, with concerns that it was already very high. They emphasised that building insurance should be used in the first instance, before the decision was made to bill them for repairs.

7.14 Theme 13: Caretakers

- 7.14.1 Many residents complimented caretakers, however others also commented that some caretakers had not been completing all their duties, especially since the pandemic. Furthermore, residents felt that it would be more effective if caretakers were to provide a consistent service and should be trained to take a more active role in spotting and reporting issues on their estates. A small number of residents had negative experiences interacting with caretakers.

7.15 Theme 14: Estate Managers

- 7.15.1 Residents said that they wanted to hear more from their estate office and for estate managers to be a more visible presence on their estates. There were also complaints made about the behaviour of individual estate managers, which impacted the ability of some residents to approach them and raise issues.

7.16 Theme 14: Parking Enforcement

- 7.16.1 Several residents wanted an update on the Traffic Management Orders to be completed on their estates. There was also some concern around the contractor in charge of car parks, with residents feeling that officers should visit the car parks more frequently and ensure a higher level of compliance in ticketing illegally parked vehicles. Other recommendations for improvements around parking included pull-up bollards to help residents secure their space, better lighting in estate car parks, and for gates to be replaced/installed to prevent illegally parked vehicles. It was suggested that these changes could reduce instances of ASB.

7.17 Theme 15: Major Works

- 7.17.1 Some residents felt that major works programme on their estate could have been more effectively project managed.

7.18 Theme 16: Services for people who are disabled or carers

7.18.1 Some people were keen to discuss what work could be undertaken to improve the support given residents with disabilities and those with care roles. This could include work to better tailor services to the needs of individual residents. The Council would also need to consider how disabled residents and carers would be affected during the transition period.

7.19 Tenant & Resident Association (TRA) response to consultation

7.19.1 Many TRA members engaged actively throughout the consultation to advocate for residents, including attending drop-in sessions, webinars and messaging the dedicated email address. Many TRA members supported the Council's proposal for insourcing, but nonetheless had a range of questions and queries. There was some concern about the costs and potential disruption of transition, particularly whether any costs would be passed back to residents in the form of service charges, rent or council tax.

7.19.2 Discussions around THH performance included:

- Concerns with some areas of THH's service delivery, namely ASB, repairs, caretaking, cleaning, communication and working in silos.
- Lack of information packs providing block-specific information for the council's estates which would help any new contractor and their operatives and reduce unnecessary incompletions, repetitive work logs and multiple visits to residents' properties. A full contractor handover from existing to new was also essential.
- A perception that service charges were high and not an accurate reflection of works carried out.
- That there is a lack of engagement with tenants, particularly relating to the complaints process, which is long and rarely followed by the implementation of practical changes.
- There appears to be poor communication between different departments of THH.
- A perception among some that the major works department is struggling to deliver on its projects and that procurement is slow.
- That the online portal, MyTHH, is in need of improvement.

7.19.3 In the event the Council makes the decision to insource THH, TRA members indicated that they would like the opportunity to feed into the process of shaping a new in-house service. They were keen to get further information on what an in-sourced service would look like on a day-to-day basis. TRA members were clear that improvement should be at the heart of any changes.

7.19.4 Suggestions for what a new in-house service might look like included:

- An effective governance regime, with a resident-tailored housing service for continuous improvement.
- Improved arrangements for joining up housing with other council services that are already relied upon by THH, including ASB, Pest Control and Facilities Management.

- The need to maintain the current housing service functions rather than transferring to a corporate call centre. This is because many residents already face issues with online and telephone communications with THH, resulting in cases that are partially resolved or not responded to. Digital exclusion is also a major concern for some residents, particularly the elderly and those who do not have IT facilities and capabilities.
- That there should not be a reduction in the frontline services that THH currently provides (e.g., caretaking, ASB, Neighbourhood Housing Office etc.).
- That funding should continue for Met Police Officers who work on reducing ASB/crime in the borough.

7.19.5 TRA members were also concerned about the impact of insourcing on THH frontline staff and did not want to see any made redundant as part of the transition. They also recognised the potential stress created for THH staff and their families and asked for reassurance that they were being well-supported by THH and LBTH senior management.

7.19.6 Feedback was also provided on the consultation methodology, with TRA members stating that they would have preferred to receive consultation materials in advance, as well as a full list of addresses for each drop-in session venue. Some did not feel that engagement events had been informative enough or well publicised. Others thought the survey should have included more questions relating to housing management functions, as well as the option to provide comments or suggestions.

7.20 Tower Hamlets Homes Board response to the consultation

7.20.1 A focus group session was conducted with Tower Hamlets Homes Board Members. The Board Members wanted to understand better the two service delivery models and evidence of efficiencies that would arise from bringing services back in-house, as well as where any savings would be spent. The Board stressed that the council must consider how to retain expertise especially in delivering new regulations and highlighted that staff retention is important to minimise disruption. The transitional period was a key concern for the board and the length of it (with some board members hoping that it would be a shorter period to minimise risk of disruption) and there were concerns that services may deteriorate. Board members also commented on how to ensure there is scrutiny of services if brought in-house and recommended that if insourcing occurs, the two independent committees scrutinising fire safety, building safety and other standards are retained. The Board felt that a single source contact for residents should be retained and that residents should be able to contact decision-makers as they are now able to. Board members wanted to be involved as plans become more detailed and examine case studies from other local authorities who have brought their ALMO (Arms-Length Management Organisation) back in-house.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The 8-week consultation on the future of services for people living in council homes collected views from a large number of stakeholders. A large majority of tenants and leaseholders agreed with the Council's proposal to bring services back in-house (both via survey and qualitative comments). In qualitative feedback, tenants and leaseholders, TRA members and THH Board provided suggestions on the future of services, in areas including service delivery, resident engagement and participation in governance, efficiencies, ensuring a smooth transition.
- 8.2 Stakeholders will continue to be engaged to shape the future of services for people living in council homes.