

Riverside Group

Calverley Close, Beckenham, BR3

Tpas Independent review of engagement during
regeneration





Tpas: The tenant engagement experts

We're Tpas. England's leading tenant engagement experts. We're dedicated to improving tenant engagement standards across the country. We bring tenants and landlords together through a wide range of services, independent and impartial advice, support, consultancy and training.

Whether you're a tenant or landlord, we're here to provide you with the skills and knowledge you need to work together. Because together, we can have constructive conversations that enable you to arrive at informed and cost-effective solutions. Solutions, for improving services. Saving money. And bringing real and long-lasting change to communities. Together we can find a way.

The key benefits

We can help you:

Harness the strategic benefit of tenant engagement

Enable your tenants, providing them with the skills, training and information they need to make a positive contribution to your business.

Get trusted, independent, impartial support

The very best advice and support, from a leading expert, dedicated to achieving excellence in tenant engagement,

Ensure tenants play a key role in improving your business

Enable tenants to help you reassess services, reduce costs and deliver cost-effective solutions that bring real and long-lasting change to communities.

Enable your staff

Keep up to date on best practice, and develop the skills and knowledge to get the very best from tenant engagement.

Keep up to date

Get the latest on national standards and best practice for tenant engagement in England.

Create a platform for constructive tenant conversations

Ensure that tenant conversations are handled in a way that maintains transparency, respect and trust, and drives your business forward.

Get your voice heard nationally

Ensure you and your tenants' concerns are raised at a national level to influence housing policy



Background

In October 2017, Riverside produced a brief to invite tenders for the role of an Independent Tenants Advisor (ITA) for Calverley Close, Beckenham within LB Bromley. A decision had been taken to regenerate three estates in South London which was to include design of a new estate and homes, a decant programme to rehouse existing residents and community development to empower the local community through the process. Two rounds of consultation events had been undertaken (each of two sessions) to inform residents of the reasons behind the decision to regenerate along with a visit to a recently regenerated estate in West London and an estate wide meeting.

To this end, a tender process was developed in conjunction with a Residents Steering Group (RSG). In December 2017, Newman Francis was appointed as the ITA for Calverley Close. Their brief was to work with the RSG to develop it into an effective voice for residents; to service meetings of the RSG; provide training and ensure effective communication with all residents - enabling residents to contribute to the proposal and make an informed decision as to whether such a project could be supported through means of a ballot, in line with the Mayor of London's requirements.

However, since the appointment of the ITA the project has not run smoothly with a gradual disengagement by the RSG from Riverside to the degree that it now appears to work completely independently from the landlord. The RSG has seen a high number of resignations from its membership to the point where the current membership is not known by the landlord. The Riverside social media group using Facebook has seen an RSG group start up on the medium to which access is controlled by the current Chair of the RSG. Similarly, the website established by the RSG has access restricted to members only.

The contract with the ITA was terminated in September 2017 due to perceived shortcomings in the services delivered. In the period since their appointment, there was no Charter signed off by residents and complaints have been made about the way in which the RSG was operating.

The regeneration project has been on hold since this time pending an independent review into the approach to resident engagement by Riverside generally, the examination of the reasons behind the high number of tenant resignations from the RSG and the relationship between the RSG and Riverside.

Methodology

In order to undertake this review in the short time available, Tpas has approached residents on an individual basis to complete a questionnaire regarding their experience of the engagement in the project to date - this was important so we were able to capture all views. As the current membership of the RSG is not known to Riverside the membership list for the RSG provided was not sure to be representative of the group. An approach was made to the Chair of the group for membership details but this was declined. Similarly, a request for access to the RSG managed Facebook group was declined. Access to the landlord Facebook group was provided.

The questionnaire for the survey was designed by Tpas in order to obtain the right feedback required to inform the review. Riverside wrote to all tenants to advise that Tpas would be carrying out the survey (the letter was approved by Tpas and contained telephone and email contact details for Tpas). This was the extent of Riverside's involvement other than providing contact details for all residents of the estate and providing access to their officers who had been involved in the project.

An offer from the Chair of the RSG to input into the survey questions and to arrange a coffee morning on the estate was declined in order to ensure independence from all parties involved to date.

In total five estate visits were made on different occasions over a 12 day period between 2-13 April. This included mornings, afternoons, evenings and weekends in order to maximise the opportunity for tenants to respond. All homes were called upon on a minimum of three occasions and, where no contact was achieved, cards were left



detailing the email and freephone telephone number that tenants could use to contact Tpas to arrange a convenient time for a return visit.

In total 66 completed questionnaires were received with a further 6 tenants declining to take part – this is a response rate of 52.17%. Whilst this is lower than had been hoped for, a number of tenants gave additional time to talk about the project and Tpas is confident that the findings of this work are valid.

The intention of the project is to review the work undertaken so far to find out what elements have worked, which have not and to try and find out where the issues are to gather evidence from tenant feedback to inform our recommendations.

In order to gain background information from all sources, members of Riverside's team were spoken to along with Neal Purvis (Open Communities) who was advising residents and Riverside up to the point that the ITA was appointed.

The report sets out our findings and evidenced recommendations. We have also broadly aligned our recommendations against the Tpas National Standards in engagement and the regulatory expectations

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) comprised of 18 questions of which the majority were closed (pre-coded) questions with the final open (spontaneous) question delivering a number of comments about the project to date and some key themes have emerged. The intention was to elicit responses as to the awareness of the project to date, the levels on engagement and involvement and the views on the roles of the three key parties involved, the landlord (Riverside), the Independent Tenants Advisor (ITA) and the Residents Steering Group (RSG). To this end, the survey was successful and identified a number of key issues which need to be addressed by all parties.

In broad terms these can be covered under the headings;

- Awareness
- Involvement
- Communication

Key issues

From our project work across other regeneration schemes, Tpas understands that talk of regeneration provokes uncertainty and fear within communities. This can be a stressful and confusing time for some if not all residents. The key for any project of this nature should be to promote and facilitate relationships between professionals and residents ensuring accountability. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened at Calverley Close. There is a high degree of distrust of the motives and aims of the landlord despite early engagement with residents in selecting the ITA.

From this point however, the aim must be to re-engage with the residents of the estate and move to a point whereby they can formally have a say on the future of their estate being fully aware of the issues in making such a decision.

Awareness

The project to regenerate the estate has a very high level of awareness amongst residents with almost 97% stating that they were aware of the proposals to some degree. Mostly this appears to have been through letters and the publicising of meetings. The onus should remain on Riverside to ensure that this continues rather than rely on the RSG or other parties to do so.

Whilst there was awareness that meetings had been held to provide information and to gather views, almost a third of respondents had not attended. Although this is a reasonable level of attendance it's clear that a substantial minority either couldn't or chose not to attend the meetings held on the estate (33.85%). Of these, the majority



gave either a lack of time (36.84%) or that the meetings were held at inconvenient times (31.58%) as reasons for their non-attendance. Clearly, the methods of enabling residents to become involved need to be widened.

There was a high level of awareness of the existence of the RSG but few respondents identified as being part of the group. Three of the four that did give generously with their time to detail what they perceived as the issues with the project as it had developed to date. Similarly, of the number of former RSG members' spoken to, longer discussion were held at their request. Unfortunately, the Chair of the RSG declined to respond to the survey. Of the reasons why they had not joined the RSG, the largest response was lack of interest (31.82%) with a quarter of respondents citing a lack of time as the reason.

Communication

The majority of the information received has been through letters and newsletters from Riverside with the Facebook page showing relatively little inroad in terms of being a means of distributing information on the project. Amongst the reasons given for this is a preference for what is perceived as the printed word offering more of a commitment against that of online communication which can be deleted or changed later. Direct communication also required less of a time commitment if it was used for updates. Meetings were seen as increasingly less favourable as the same ground was covered time and again and little progress appears to have been made relative to the commitment required to attend. Of those who gave 'other', the checking of information of Riverside's website was the most popular.

In terms of communication by the RSG to the wider resident's body, 42.19% stated they had attended a meeting held by the RSG - although 45.45% stated they were unaware of how to contact the RSG should they have concerns about the proposals. Whilst much of the communication and support for the RSG should have been provided by the ITA this is still a high figure for the body represented by the RSG. Whilst the Chair of the RSG has a notice on his front door there was no evidence in the block noticeboards or elsewhere on the estate of how the RSG could be contacted. In addition, both the Facebook page and the website are closed and RSG members have to approve access for those wanting to join. The reason given is that residents should have a safe space for discussions without the landlord being able to see the views of individuals. This is a reasonable argument for the Facebook page but not so much for a website which is a far less interactive forum and is generally used for the sharing of information rather than publicly gathering views. Anecdotally, the RSG members spoken to had no fears of landlord repercussions for expressing their views and no evidence of such has been seen.

Looking at how information has been received by residents so far in the process;

	How do you normally receive information about the proposals		How would you prefer to receive information about the proposals	
Number of respondents	64		63	
<i>Newsletters</i>	19	29.69%	16	25.40%
<i>Meetings</i>	8	12.50%	7	11.11%
<i>Letters</i>	43	67.19%	41	65.08%
<i>Email</i>	3	4.69%	12	19.05%
<i>Facebook (Riverside)</i>	6	9.38%	6	9.52%
<i>Facebook (RSG)</i>	8	12.50%	8	12.70%
<i>From Friends and neighbours</i>	13	20.31%	0	0.00%
<i>Other (Please specify)</i>	7	10.94%	6	9.52%



For the majority, receiving letters directly from Riverside is the preferred method for distributing information, although newsletters and the use of email are also methods with a level of support. It can be seen that whilst over a fifth of residents say they receive their information from friends and neighbours, this isn't a preferred means of communication at all. There is also relatively low support for the use of Facebook as a means of getting information but, as with email, it widens the scope of places where residents can get the most recent information on the progress of the project.

Engagement

The awareness of Newman Francis was quite high (83.33%) - although this figure drops when looking at how many residents had been contacted by them (63.08%). This is less than what should be expected over the period of their appointment and work on the estate.

In terms of how well residents felt each party had performed in their respective roles, overall the results were disappointing for all.

Less tenants rated the work of the RSG in representing their views, as Good or Very Good (26.56%), than they did Riverside (35.38%) or the ITA (32.20%). However less tenants rated the RSG as Poor or Very Poor (18.75%) than Riverside (40.00%) or the ITA (37.29%). The bulk of the views expressed about the RSG were in the Neither Good nor Bad category with over half the respondents expressing this view (53.13%). The questionnaire did not give the option of 'Don't Know' as a response but many tenants chose the middle option in the absence of don't know (for all groups) as a large number said they didn't have a clear idea of what any of the groups had done to date. This is a problem as it indicates a large proportion of the estate are not actively engaging in the process so far.

With the final question we sought the views as to what could have been done to make the process so far better? Whilst it is more difficult to collate response to an open-ended question such as this, there were some key themes which emerged.

Firstly, that the process to date had taken far too long and that no-one is any clearer now as to the future of the estate than they were at the outset. Mention was made of the lack of answers to questions posed by residents and that meetings tended to continually cover the same ground. However, there were a number of tenants who just wanted to see the project finish and for work to begin with the aim of getting a new home.

With the lack of certainty around the future of the estate a number of comments were made about repairs not being undertaken to their homes because "they're coming down". Some saw this as a process of managed decline so that demolition became the only viable option.

A second theme was that the communication from Riverside in particular had not been good enough. This links to the point above regarding clarity and that there was also a lack of commitment from Riverside as to what undertakings they could make to tenants regarding tenancies, rent levels, size of any new homes, provision of houses, etc.). Much of this would ordinarily be included in a Charter produced by a landlord so that tenants could have assurances about how they can expect to be treated in the future. It's noted that a draft Charter was produced before the ITA was appointed but that this does not appear to have ever been formally agreed and issued to all tenants.

There is an underlying mistrust of the motives of Riverside in embarking on the regeneration proposal itself rather than address the repair issues on the estate. There was some feeling that this was a done deal and that Riverside had worked up proposals from the outset (why else were appointed architects at the first open event?). In part, this links to the lack of communication over the project to date. This demonstrates a lack of clarity in terms of the demarcation of roles of all parties, the expectations that arise from the lack of clarity and the overall lack of trust in Riverside.



Conclusion

This project has significantly lost its way for a number of reasons;

- Time taken to date
- Lack of Communication
- ITA performance not meeting expectations
- RSG working in isolation

As was noted above, the time taken for this project to move not very far has been excessive. Any goodwill from tenants has been reduced as a result, from both those for and against the prospect of demolition and new build - this has been exacerbated by poor performance by the ITA and a corresponding lack of communication with tenants.

Riverside have relied too much on an ITA who was not performing well and ensuring that tenants were kept informed of progress. In part, this was due to an over reliance on funnelling information through the RSG which was operating in isolation. The RSG, in only using a website and Facebook page which required approval to join, failed to ensure that they engage actively with the wider estate body. There have been evident tensions between members of the RSG which resulted in a high number of resignations from the group and were not adequately addressed by the ITA. The ITA should have better addressed the requirement that all tenants were able to know the outcomes of discussions and consultations with Riverside in order to form a view on the proposals. Instead their energies seem to have concentrated on a relationship with a small number of tenants rather than all who live on the estate.

It is not uncommon for the RSG to become a focus for tenants who oppose plans for regeneration. This has the advantage of ensuring that there are robust challenges to any plans from the landlord and results in clear and focussed information being obtained - there is some evidence of this in the minutes of the two meetings provided to Tpas (May and July 2018). Nothing that has been communicated to the estate and the Charter still not having been agreed despite it being recorded in the May meeting that this would form the bulk of the discussion in the July meeting (it wasn't).

Recommendations

There is a clear need to appoint a new ITA and residents' views should be sought as to the criteria for procurement as well as in the selection process.

Given the relationship that now appears to exist between the RSG and Riverside and between past and present members of the RSG, Tpas believes that it is too late for this to be used as the main vehicle for consultation and engagement going forward. Any attempt to reboot the group runs the risk of further alienation of the residents still involved. Tpas suggests that the RSG should be discontinued, with all residents communicated to on an equal basis in the future. Whilst a steering group is accepted good practice for regeneration schemes, this project needs to move forward to provide tenants with clarity as to the future of their homes. Once the project has developed further it may be possible to establish one again at a later stage or, form a joint project group with residents to inform proposals.

It is recommended that Riverside undertake the following actions in relation to ensuring the process continues to a point when residents can be balloted on the options and the proposed redevelopment either moves forward or is terminated in accordance with the wish of residents via the ballot.

Immediately, Riverside should write to every resident on the estate setting out what has happened to date, including this report, and set out a clear timeline going forward to ensure that all tenants are clear on when they will be able to have a formal say on the final proposals. A clear engagement and communication strategy needs to



be developed setting out clear roles for all parties, assessing the risks and setting out the key messages to be imparted.

Alongside this Riverside should publish a set of undertakings (Charter) setting out their responses to all of the questions raised by tenants in the process to date. This should include the following issues as a minimum and any other issues raised in the meetings of the RSG and in drop-in sessions;

- Type of tenancy to be offered
- Rent levels (including whether or not the rents will be based on existing for those that move to better meet their housing needs)
- Impact of new homes on Council Tax banding
- What each tenant will be offered in any new development (number of bedrooms)
- What will the size of rooms be in comparison with existing?
- Will adult family members be offered their own homes?
- Are the houses to be included in any development?
- If tenants wish to move where they can expect to receive offers (location) and how many offers will be made
- Compensation for any improvements made to their homes
- What the current design proposals are
- How tenants can contribute to any design proposals
- Timescale – from present to projected ballot date
- Timescale – if redevelopment is voted for what are the expected timescales for delivering new homes?

In terms of consultation and engagement, a programme for events (drop-ins, general meetings, workshops etc.) should be developed. Future events should be held on different days and at different times in order to maximise the number of tenants able to take part.

Future consultation should take the form of one-to-one meetings as well as more general events. All results should be published to the whole estate within 2 weeks of any event, with any changes as a result of tenant feedback being communicated to all tenants - this could be done as part of series of questions that are then collated and circulated to tenants, together with Riverside's response.

By way of background, Riverside should set out the way in which any development will take place (partnership with a private developer etc.), the rationale for increasing the density of the estate and how any development will be financed. This should include the impact of the recent financial downturn in the property market and the impact this will have on the financial model being used.

All of the above constitutes a large amount of information and it is therefore suggested that it is circulated in sections, perhaps under a series of headings (engagement, design finance, etc.) with the programme of information to be circulated and thus forming part of the initial communication.

All information published should be made available on Riverside's website together with an undertaking to provide hard copies to anyone who wishes to receive it. The lack of trust is such that anything published on the website alone will not be trusted as it can be changed/amended/deleted.

Given the perception that repairs are not being undertaken on the estate it is also suggested that a Repair Group is established during the project to look specifically at the repairing issue and to address the responsive repairs to be undertaken.



APPENDIX 1

Your Details		
Name		
Address		
Survey		
Q1	Are you aware of the proposals from Riverside to undertake regeneration of the estate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q2	If no, why do you think this is? (please explain):	
Q3	Have you ever attended any public meetings about the proposal?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q4	If no, why not? (please tick all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Was never notified of meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Not interested in attending <input type="checkbox"/> Happy to just receive information <input type="checkbox"/> No point, my views are never listened to by Riverside/RSG/ITA (specify which): <input type="checkbox"/> Not held at convenient times <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to be involved <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to be involved through other means (please specify):	
Q5	Are you aware of the Resident Steering Group (RSG) that has been established?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q6	Are you a member of the RSG?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q7	Have you ever been a member of the RSG?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q8	If no, why is this? <input type="checkbox"/> Not interested <input type="checkbox"/> Happy to let others speak for me <input type="checkbox"/> Don't like meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Not held at convenient times <input type="checkbox"/> Wasn't aware that I could <input type="checkbox"/> Never heard of the RSG <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
Q9	Have you ever been to a meeting organised by the RSG?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No



Q10	Do you know how to contact the RSG?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q11	How do you normally receive information about the proposals? <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletters <input type="checkbox"/> Meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Letters <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook (Riverside) <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook (RSG) <input type="checkbox"/> From friends or neighbours <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
Q12	How would you prefer to receive information about the proposals? <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletters <input type="checkbox"/> Meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Letters <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook (Riverside) <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook (RSG) <input type="checkbox"/> From friends or neighbours <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
Q13	Were you aware that residents had appointed Independent Advisor (ITA) Newman Francis?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q14	Were you ever contacted by the ITA Newman Francis?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Q15	Overall, how well would you say the RSG has been at representing your views? <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Neither Good nor Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Very Poor	
Q16	Overall, how well would you say Riverside has been at letting you make your views known? <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Neither Good nor Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Very Poor	
Q17	Overall, how well would you say the ITA has been at letting you make your views known? <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Neither Good nor Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Very Poor	
Q18	What in your view, could have been done to make the process better? (Please explain): <div style="height: 100px;"></div>	