

Wider Council recommendations for trauma-informed and restorative consultations and wider practice

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Summary

This paper makes recommendations for how the wider Council can embed restorative practice. It looks at areas beyond the design, delivery and analysis of the specific consultation activities carried out by the Grenfell Partnerships Team; but even so, this analysis is a key part of our scrutiny of the consultation, rather than additional to it. In order for the consultation *as a whole* to be considered restorative and trauma informed, the EST has needed to consider the context in which it has operated. A restorative process cannot fully develop in one silo of the Council's work only.

Therefore, our remit has also been to take note of wider experiences of bereaved, survivors and community members in relation to the Council. We have listened to and learned from a large number of bereaved, survivors, and members of the local community, on the consultation specifically, but also about their wider experiences.

We present the learnings here, informed directly by people's experiences, which will be useful to the wider Council, and to its work in service delivery and engagement with its stakeholders.

From these learnings we make recommendations on how the steps towards restorative practice, started in the approach to the consultation, can be embedded in the wider council and built upon in future.

In line with our formative and restorative approach to scrutiny, these learnings are initially for discussion. However we hope that they can lead to solid commitments to action by the

Council, which can have impacts beyond the Grenfell Partnerships Team; so that we can endorse this consultation as thoroughly as we would like to do.

We are not able to confirm that the consultation as a whole is fair, restorative and trauma informed, until we have engaged the Council senior leadership on these wider questions and had some feedback.

What is in this document?

In this document, first we explain some of the **philosophy of restorative practice** as it applies to the wider Council.

Then we are asking for commitments to address issues in **three areas**. The areas are -

- 1. Improvements to the way the Council connects with and trusts residents**
- 2. Improvement to the experience of service delivery in the round from residents**
- 3. Improvements to the way the wider Council connects with and supports the Grenfell Partnerships Team**

We recognise that the Council is already aware of and taking action to address some of the priorities we outline. We acknowledge examples of where we know action is already being taken, as well as recommendations to help make these actions more joined up, transparent and effective based on what we have heard through our scrutiny role.

In this paper, for each area, we set out the **overarching commitment to action** we seek in order to make our final recommendation that the consultation is fair, restorative and trauma informed.

We then go into more detail about the **evidence** we found, and, for discussion, give specific examples of **how a commitment to action could be implemented**. We acknowledge that the details of such commitments are beyond our remit, but ask that we are able to see some evidence of consideration, design and implementation of commitments which are along the right lines.

This will satisfy the EST that this consultation's approach is not a one-off (which would create further harm in itself), but instead is a start point for future restorative practice.

1. Introduction

The External Scrutiny Team has needed to test whether the consultation has been **trauma informed and restorative**. Judging whether something is restorative involves looking more widely than the actual documents, words, tasks and processes of the consultation. It involves listening and attempting to understand how and if those who are involved, both from the local community and council, see the consultation as a way of building relationships in context.

Our remit has been narrow and we have remained confined to the consultation design, process and outputs. We have not conducted formal scrutiny processes on the whole of the Council and all its activities, and we are not suggesting that we are aware of all the activities the Council carries out, or its relationships with residents across the board. Our challenge and recommendations therefore are coming from an evidence base limited by our role. Having said this, a qualitative practice as engagement professionals tells us that if we are observing a feeling or opinion held by some people, then it is present in the system and the system could benefit from addressing it.

However, we have had a large number of conversations with residents, bereaved, survivors and many different people and groups connected to Grenfell, the immediate local community and North Kensington. While the work of the GPT is hugely valued, as are the people in the team, we found that people who engaged in this consultation in general do not experience the *wider* Council as restorative and trauma informed, or as desiring to become more restorative and trauma informed. This affects willingness to engage with the Council, as some people who are willing to work together with the Council, do not yet have a concrete sense that the Council is willing to work with them in return.

We found that the general experience of the Council, as expressed by participants, seemed to limit their ability to experience the consultation itself as restorative and trauma informed.

What is restorative and trauma informed?

When we as EST say restorative we mean the below:

A restorative approach is one which considers the need to prioritise: fair process, voice, accountability, working 'with', and restorative questions (questions that take into account trauma, start from a place of strengths and assets, and centre the importance of relationships). Working in this way acknowledges the harm which those impacted have experienced and works to actively centre relationships, respect, responsibility, repair and reintegration throughout.

In our scrutiny we applied restorative theory and the theory of trauma-informed practice. Restoration is perhaps first thought of as a way to meet the needs of residents and local people and to help them heal from the trauma they have undergone. However, in order to do this fully, it is important to acknowledge the challenges felt within the Council as well as in the community; challenges of leading and working in a space of trauma.

Therefore, this is not a set of recommendations purely for external activities the council should do. That, in some ways, would simply put more delivery pressure on the council and may be counterproductive. As well as things to do, we are considering the things that council leaders and staff members may *need*, as individuals, in order to work in a more restorative way in future.

The context within which the council leadership and other staff are working, affects the relationship between council and community, and the extent to which relationships can be restored is limited without acknowledging the non-restorative parts of the system within the council as well as those in the community.

Given the timing of the Inquiry, the continued presence of the tower, and the events of the tragedy and failures of national government and council mistakes, working restoratively is difficult. All local government leadership, in an inherently adversarial world, often needs to project confidence and provide evidence of action in the face of challenge. However, this very confidence and orientation towards solutions, essential as it is for good governance, can sometimes get in the way of holding space for building restorative relationships.

In order for Council leaders to be open, honest about mistakes, and transparent when they don't have all the answers, everyone (the Council and local people) needs to enter into conversations in a restorative way. The Council has a role to play in creating the spaces that enable these kinds of conversations e.g. being able to facilitate the discussion of difficult topics and explore tradeoffs in a way that takes into account context and does not re-traumatise. We have seen examples of the Grenfell Partnership Team doing this well, and increased trust from bereaved, survivors and local community as a result.

The council's **Co-designed Service Standards**¹ are effective in setting out many important actions the council needs to undertake for the community; but currently, there is less emphasis on what support the staff team themselves might need in order to be able to effectively meet these standards. For example, "...have empathy, show they care, be human, honest and accountable" - these are hard behaviours to uphold, without support specific to the context and tasks.

As this consultation marks the start of a more restorative relationship, there is potential here for the Council to commit to actions for the community but also to build on change within. The EST is aware that this may need further conversation and consideration.

¹<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/contact-us/co-designed-service-standards#:~:text=Working%20to%20be%20a%20caring,access%20Council%20services%20in%20person.>

2. Improvements to the way the Council connects with and trusts residents

One of the biggest themes that came up across both consultations was a perception that the “wider Council” is not visible enough locally in general. There is a feeling the Council does not make spaces to listen without an agenda, and instead of hearing first, jumps to solutions and defensiveness. This gives the impression the Council does not welcome challenges and for some, that the Council does not trust residents to raise issues or work together to solve them productively.

This is about being open to feedback, creating space for the knowledge, skills and experience of residents. This also involves being able to take the next steps to discuss and work through any criticism in a way that supports arriving at practical solutions. We have seen appetite from residents to working in this way.

We asked for a commitment to:

- **Senior level engagement with the idea of restorative relationships as part of the community’s healing after tragedy.** We would like to see cross-Council commitment to truly restorative processes in future, and greater senior visibility in ensuring this commitment is actioned. This should include senior leadership and colleagues across the Council, including in key services such as housing. This is likely to require some ongoing training or coaching to support development of capacity within the Council.
- **More embedded participatory approaches in the Council.** Other Councils, for example Camden, Croydon, Westminster, Hackney and Test Valley, are proactive in engaging their communities in exploring trade offs across a range of policy areas. We know that RBKC has explored this, for example, as a member of the Local Climate Engagement Coaching group; and we recommend further development. We are mindful here that the particular circumstances of the Grenfell tragedy make a commitment to citizen participation particularly difficult; for other local authorities who are not the site of internationally significant tragic events, these processes can be begun more easily. However, residents of this Borough deserve the same access to best practice citizen engagement as anyone else in the UK, and a restorative relationship will include the council stating its intention to move in this direction.

What we heard and saw

- **We heard repeatedly that since the disbanding of the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee in 2019,** some residents feel that there is no formal accountability mechanism for the Council’s engagement with residents. The Council’s Scrutiny pages on the website are not all up to date. If scrutiny is happening, it is not comprehensively communicated with this community.
- **We heard from bereaved, survivors, local residents of the immediate local community and North Kensington that there is common belief that the Council**

“fears” the angry and accusatory voices of stakeholders (though this is not their opinion of the GPT). In this perception that they are feared, community members also feel that they are not respected, due both to their status as those who suffered at Grenfell, and to wider structural inequalities in race, class and disability. This lack of care and respect is seen as a key contributory cause of the fire, and we heard that residents don’t believe that this has changed or can change.

- **We heard that people perceive a lack of adequate routes for influencing the Council’s policies and decisions.** People feel the Council doesn’t act on what they say they are going to do, or on what residents have told them. The EST has investigated with the Council and has been told about a number of initiatives and routes. However, in the feedback from this consultation scrutiny, the overarching feeling is that there is a need to move from one off consultations on specific questions, to more open ended engagement on overall priorities. This may reduce consultation fatigue. There are a range of participatory approaches and methods of engagement open to the Council - and examples of these being used at different times. However, it is not clear how and when these are being used consistently, how decisions are made about how to engage, and how widespread across the Council are the skills and knowledge needed for good participatory practice.
- **We heard some examples where more skill was needed in creating the spaces and processes for influence, for example a lack of facilitation skill.** There were some examples given of historical poor practice in holding community meetings, for example some voices given more licence to complain and disrupt agendas, taking more than their share of space. We do not have data to say that this happens often or regularly; but when a sense of connection with the Council’s decision making is shaky, these anecdotes are used to support the narrative of a lack of trust.

“Who is this going to ? This information? Will the higher ups be involved? Do they care? When will the higher ups show up? We want senior officers to be visible.”

“There is no accountability from the Council. ‘They’ can do what they want”

“I stopped going to the scrutiny meetings because people would behave badly and they wouldn’t stop them”

“I want a scrutiny committee so when there are issues we could have a meeting and people would answer to the community they service.”

“There is mistrust with the Council and their leadership. You’ll find people don’t like the word “scrutiny” as it was used then they shut down all the scrutiny meetings summarily and nobody knew what happened. So there will be eye rolling.”

Recommendations

- **Senior level engagement with the idea of restorative relationships as part of the community’s healing after tragedy.** This is an approach less about action and

more about tonality. To be confident that the learnings from this consultation are being embedded, we would see senior leadership expressing a narrative that the broader relationship with the Council is one of listening as well as speaking and acting..

- One learning from the consultation engagement may be transferable. The consultation appeared to work best to calm anxieties when feedback was given by participants, then heard, and taken on board, without an immediate response of a list of actions from the Council. Giving feedback “room to breathe” in other settings could be a simple and pragmatic way to signal a move from a more adversarial and defended approach to a more restorative one.
- **With regard to moving towards more participatory approaches**, we recommend you explore the [spectrum of participation](#) and consider how a participatory approach can be applied more across the board, used in flexible ways to inform different decisions. We recognise that some of this work is in progress (e.g. the service standards referenced above and further examples below) but that overall the Council is at a relatively early stage in its journey to more participatory working. We recommend that the Council leadership takes a strategic view to ensure different strands of related work are connected and cohesive, that commitments are clear internally and externally, and that learning from implementation is shared and acted on to continually improve and develop the Council’s overall approach to participation. Monitoring this approach from the perspectives of bereaved, survivors and local residents close to Grenfell Tower would also give useful data on how the approach is working.
- **In relation to holding spaces and conversation with the community**, we recommend that council staff are allowed space to reflect on their own needs as facilitators and space holders. Staff should then receive support in the form of training and/or supervision from experienced external facilitators who are restorative and trauma informed practitioners. When conversations are likely to be challenging for either community members or council staff, and either feels the need for external facilitation, we would recommend that this is explored. We have seen how training, supervision and independent facilitation, all have a positive impact on the meetings that the GPT have held over the course of these consultations.
- **Where relevant policies are in place, ensure these are up-to-date and are available on the Council’s website**, and regularly publish a transparent assessment of your progress and learning. In relation to participation, **there is a broken link on your website to the contents of your Charter for Public Participation**, adopted in 2020, and no public information as to how it is being implemented. We would recommend an up-to-date version of the Charter and evidence of how it is being used.

- **We acknowledge that you made public commitments on equality and diversity, following the Grenfell fire, and published an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.** You also committed to publishing an annual review of progress; however, there is nothing published on your website that we have been able to source. Good practice would be to publish a transparent assessment of your progress and learning.
- **Make Council staff and leadership more visible in North Kensington,** and particularly in close proximity to the tower. Residents need to feel that Council staff and leaders are willing to visit, respect and listen to them. This includes Council leadership being visible to bereaved, survivors and the local community beyond those who are part of key stakeholder groups.
- **Given the levels of frustration we have heard about the lack of visibility of the Council's senior leadership throughout the period of consultation** on the Future Grenfell support programme, as well as generally in North Kensington, we recommend that you plan how to redress this.
 - a. North Kensington residents need to feel that Council staff and leaders are willing to visit and listen to them - not that they are always expected to go to the Town Hall to have access to decision-makers. We are aware that in practice, senior leaders do spend time with North Kensington residents, but there is still felt to be a lack of access underlining inequalities in power and resources between different areas of the Borough.
 - b. Council Leaders could, potentially, make themselves visible to articulate that the Grenfell Support Programme can never be enough to resolve all of the legacy of the fire, nor address the underlying broad systemic inequities. One of the key learnings of the consultation is that simply people with accountability naming the tensions can go some way to enable healing. There may be a need for support for the leadership and facilitated spaces to help this work well. For example facilitators could help structure open spaces, 1 to 1s, Q&As, and help find ways to manage and name tensions in the room so that the pressure is not entirely on the leadership.

3. Improvement to the experience of service delivery in the round from residents

We asked for a commitment to:

More person-centred approaches; considering how to make services fit together better and deliver in a way which creates positive impacts on the wider determinants of health and wellbeing.

This was because we heard feedback about experiences of poor services and, possibly even more importantly, poor communication about services, which appeared to affect their ability to engage with the consultation and with future support in an atmosphere of trust.

What we heard and saw

- **Some people feel that there is a lack of responsiveness to the Grenfell context in the way that services are delivered.** For example, from those on Lancaster West estate, we heard that the W11 team focus on the practicalities of building work. This can mean that when there is a need for more sensitive and responsive feedback to community problems and challenges, the tone of response can feel out of kilter.
- **We heard many complaints about inadequate housing and repairs**, long delays in responses, lack of respect from contractors, poor communication around the timing of housing repairs and people waiting months for repairs to be completed. In these contexts, consultation on future services which asked about how wellbeing and other wider needs could be met, seemed confusing and inappropriate, when more fundamental issues were not being addressed
- **We heard complaints about how housing repairs are being handled**, with constant noise from building work, little control over how and when things are done and no respite offered. This lack of agency residents felt can exacerbate trauma caused by the fire. We heard again and again that residents want a more joined-up approach to housing repairs and maintenance and better assessment of their needs.
 - **For example we heard an example where a disabled woman had repairs done on her bathroom.** *"I had no electricity for 5 days and they didn't even know I was a wheelchair user with specific extra needs. They said it wasn't their business that I couldn't use my wet room or my chair or bed levers to get me up and down - but they know I am disabled because they have that data about me."*
- **There was a feeling that the wider Council does not recognise the ongoing impacts of the fire** and how this affects how people engage with services. For example, people said they saw newly installed fire exits not properly maintained, and temporary building screens put up across fire routes, which is particularly triggering, and makes people feel the Council still doesn't care about them.

- **We heard people talk about the costs being imposed on community organisations and lease-holders** to bring their properties up to fire regulations, and how people felt threatened and scared, and angry about the way the Council approached this, with some people being threatened with court action if they did not comply.
- When discussing Future Grenfell Support, residents often pointed out that **existing services, e.g. training and employment support, did not feel trauma-informed or responsive** to their needs. There was a view that trauma-informed training should be mandatory for all staff, and that this should be an ordinary expectation for service delivery in this area, beyond any commitment within this particular funded programme.
- We heard comments about **general Council services needing to be less bureaucratic, more joined-up, and more bespoke.**

"Housing officers need training. The tone of communication needs improving. It should be trauma-informed. Bespoke approaches are needed."

"For me – what resonated – nothing has changed. Processes haven't changed. Housing repairs.... It's a full-time job to chase the Council. There is no accountability. I don't believe that the number of complaints have gone down. Building safety decisions are not being made by housing specialists. But by administrators and budget holders. "

"People don't want to go into Council buildings... people won't go to appointments on their own."

"Provision needs to be human and tailored, not bureaucratic and standardised."

"The context of all this is how the Council operates when people ask for help. There is inequality, them and us, mental health, social care, that might come under a different bit of the Council but these people have still had a serious trauma on their doorstep!"

"Council have blinkers and are living in the past. They need to make their services fit in with us, at the moment we are expected to fit with them. They want development to make the area how they want it - but we don't want millionaire's row, we live here - they work for US."

Recommendations

- **Ongoing work is needed to overcome the legacy of mistrust in the Council** and how this impacts on Grenfell residents' interactions with all Services. Across the country there is a move towards ways of designing and delivering services which are **more person-centred, bespoke and co-produced**. These better recognise people's assets and build on their strengths, as well as meeting their needs. This shift seems relevant for RBKC, where many residents have complex needs as a legacy of the fire and a high level of distrust in the Council. Recognising the need to work together openly and transparently is more (not less) important in the Grenfell context.

- We have noted your **Co-designed Service Standards** and commend their content and approach. They seem, on a light touch review, to be fully in line with the changes which residents are asking for.
 - We recommend a live and updated implementation plan for how efforts to uphold the service standards are playing out in practice with some honest and transparent reflection on what is improving, and where there is still work to do. This should include a clear allocation of accountability and a plan for monitoring and reviewing your success.
 - You should also consider how to evidence a focus on culture change and staff capabilities as well as technical improvements to processes and systems.
- A key plank of restorative practice is to foster **a strong culture of learning and openness**, with spaces for genuine dialogue between different teams of staff and between staff and residents. This could be described as a 'positive error culture', with staff knowing they won't get blamed either by service users or their own teams if they are honest about what's not working/what has gone wrong. We have seen the Grenfell Partnerships Team developing these skills and recommend that the senior leadership of the Council investigates how far this culture operates in other areas of the Council's work, and consider what steps are required to embed it.
- The Council needs to continue to acknowledge the legacy of Grenfell and the ongoing context (inquiry, legal process) and how it impacts on all service delivery. **All front line staff should be trauma aware**, no matter what job they are doing.

We recognise that the Council is already taking action on some of the above. For example, the development of the co-designed service standards, ensuring all social workers are trained in systemic practice, and beginning a three year training programme for housing staff to develop capabilities in more relational and community-centred ways of working. Where this is the case, the priority is to ensure these efforts are visible as part of Council external commitments, and are communicated as part of a joined up, intentional programme. There is also a need to assess if and how they are making a difference to resident experiences, and act on feedback to embed these new ways of working as the norm. We would recommend that this assessment of how the experience of residents is changing is co-designed by residents.

4. Improvements to the way the wider Council connects with and supports the Grenfell Partnerships Team

We asked for a commitment to:

- **Senior level Council officer engagement with the findings of the consultation and the future support service**, with cross-Council commitment to truly restorative processes in future. This means commitment to restorative work is seen as a whole-Council project, and mutual learnings to be shared between the GPT and the wider council. This should involve plans for the Council to continue to learn and embed these ways of working, with the GPT as a core part of this. There is an opportunity here to enable the success of the Grenfell Future Support Programme, especially in the community provision for an advocacy team which can make links with wider Council services.

Our understanding of restorative and trauma-informed practice tells us that the requirement for *one team* within the Council (the GPT) to behave in a restorative fashion - in a context where outstanding injustices were still at play and where other areas of the Council were not operating in this way - places a burden on the team.

We are not saying here that we see any performance issues with the way the GPT team ran this consultation. We commend the team for their dedicated and skilled work, which we have seen. However, to allow restorative practice to continue and flourish at RBKC, this team will need more peer support and shared practice with other teams.

What we heard and saw:

- **We heard a lot of criticism about the lack of visibility of Council leadership** during the Future Grenfell Support consultation process. GPT staff have been the only 'face' of the consultation and this has left the impression that the wider Council don't care about the bereaved, survivors and wider community impacted by the fire.
 - We note that there was a specific decision made in the Council to create a distance between the GSA process and Council leadership, and that this was done in good faith and for reasons of good governance. However, bereaved, survivors and residents we spoke to did not know this had been done (at least did not say they knew to us), and in a vacuum simply felt that the wider Council was not present or visible. This suggests that the issue was not the plan itself, but potentially the communication around it.
- **We have heard that the patient and careful work undertaken by the GPT can be undermined by actions of the wider Council;** we have heard of instances of a lack of respect, listening, responsiveness, and trauma-informed practice exhibited by some officers and some elected members.

- **There was an absence of other areas of the Council**, representing relevant services, during the consultation process. Again, this was a decision taken, but the consultation could have been an opportunity to better join up Grenfell support with other services, and for other services to hear and understand what those impacted by the fire need and want from RBKC services as a whole. There is now an opportunity to do this through implementation.
- **We observed that GPT were asked to do an enormous amount of difficult work with quite limited capacity** - conducting a fast moving series of consultations, while holding very flexible open ended time slots for stakeholders to input, whilst also managing and beginning to decommission or transition existing services. We have seen the pressure that this has exerted on the team, for example we can see volumes of work completed by small numbers of people in short timeframes. We want to be clear that the team have not complained to us about this pressure - indeed they have conducted themselves very professionally throughout. We have wondered to what extent the team, and potentially other teams in the council, is supported with the personal impact of listening continually to stories of trauma and being blamed for institutional historical failings.

"You (GPT) are doing a good job at engaging. But while the housing dept are still sending out letters like that..."

"Council teams have different powers. The Council as a whole needs to own this piece of work.. Housing, Neighbourhood Team, we have all different relationships."

"They need a general meeting for this not a consultation - we don't trust them to do what they say they will do so we won't believe anything until we see action."

"Your legal department are disgusting. All you think about is money... I wrote to my local Councillor, but she didn't get back to me. Where are your top people? Are they still in their towers? They aren't visible."

Recommendations

- **It is essential that findings from the consultation that are relevant and can be addressed by other Council teams and services are shared and taken on board.** There could, for example, be shared learnings across GPT and other service areas which could be jointly agreed as good places to make a commitment.
- **Given the amount of feedback we have heard on the progress still to be made on embedding a trauma-informed and restorative approach** across the Council, we recommend further training for Council staff, on restorative and trauma-informed practice so that the GPT and colleagues can work more closely and supportively together. Ideally some of this training would be done jointly with residents and Councillors, which would help to build a more resilient network of restorative relationships between the Council and community at all levels.
- **Given what we have heard about how mistakes undermine the restorative work being undertaken by GPT**, there is a need to understand how they happen and what

can be done to change matters. What can you learn about why such things keep happening and how can you prevent them?

- **Council Leaders should recognise the vital and important restorative work being done by GPT**, and ensure that the team (and all staff working in this difficult context) has sufficient capacity and receive adequate support for the sake of their welfare and their ability to continue doing their work as well as they are able to.

5. Next Steps - for discussion

- The EST would like to see **evidence that RBKC's senior leadership have considered the implications of this review for ongoing restorative relationships.**
- We would like to see a **time-bound and specific set of commitments towards broader restorative relationship building.** We have made suggestions above as first considerations, but the key to this practice will be to commit to what is possible and practical in the operational context of the Council. We would like to see these commitments before we publish our final report in August.
- Ideally these commitments would be **monitored transparently** with feedback to the wider community, and this should sit alongside scrutiny and monitoring of the delivery of the Future Support Programme.

The actions under these commitments can sit alongside the consultation and provide robust evidence for the EST that the consultation has, in fact, been trauma informed and restorative, in taking a definitive step towards building wider restorative and trauma informed practice.