

Interim judgement on response to wider council recommendations

08/11/24

Background

The Grenfell Partnerships Team (GPT) sent a draft response to the EST's recommendations for the wider council to the EST on 21 October 2024. This document was a point by point response to many of the recommendations we made, based on early discussions with the Council's Executive Management Team. The EST team then had a conversation with the GPT about the particular points and the overarching approach.

We note that it is for the Council rather than the EST to create the eventual detailed plan and we are not looking for this level of detail in the response.

However, we are able to refine the challenge for the council and give more specific guidance on how the recommendations could best be met to finalise the consultation scrutiny. We would hope that the points below can be part of the final response report to satisfy the EST that these recommendations are being taken seriously.

Scope of work required to meet EST recommendations

Overarching framing and engagement of the Council's senior management and leadership with this

Addressing the requirement to work with residents differently should include **an overarching narrative as well as a series of activities in a list.**

The reason we are underlining this is that the core to solving the relational challenge with residents is not a **technical** challenge, solved by a series of tasks. Technical challenges are where the problem is well defined, with a solution that is known or knowable. The response required is largely rational and logical and requires drawing on expertise.

Building a better relationship with residents is an **adaptive** challenge. Adaptive challenges require learning, experimentation and new practice. Addressing these problems often requires changing

people in some way - changing their mindset, changing their behaviour, changing their values. The people holding the problem are part of the problem, and are also part of the solution.

It can be difficult and emotional work - and sometimes this work must take place in a professional setting where this hasn't traditionally been the culture. It is natural that workplace culture tends to steer us towards avoiding that work and focusing on objective logical and technical problems. However, these don't tend to address the complexity of an adaptive challenge.

There will be technical tasks required to help develop a new relationship with residents e.g. updating the RBKC website, organising training. But the challenge overall and many of the tasks required are adaptive.

Treating the issue as an adaptive challenge may require a deeper consideration of what needs to change in the council's culture, and hence may initially feel that it requires more of people - but is far more likely to make a sustained difference.

The EST's core criterion for whether the consultation will, in the long term, be restorative, is about whether we can see evidence of the council meeting this adaptive challenge, and whether it shows insight into its own mindsets.

We acknowledge that this kind of change from within a system is hard. We also know, for example, that the tools used (e.g the soft skills like check ins, used in meetings) can feel unfamiliar, sometimes even irrelevant or intrusive in professional settings. The benefits seem opaque in the context of the technical day job of running a council. The EST knows that it is unrealistic to expect a council to move into this way of working immediately and wholesale.

Nevertheless, the EST, the Inquiry report and community feedback has **consistently highlighted a need to increase skill in the council in thinking about the relationship between residents and council.**

To this end, we'd recommend that the Council's senior management and leadership engage with the workshopping of what success looks like and what the most important things are to achieve.

We would like to see evidence of the Council's senior management and leadership feeling able to step into the space and considering how mindset changes can be achieved. We warn that this agenda is unlikely to succeed if it is devolved to GPT to implement rather than feeling like a shared endeavour.

Technical and adaptive challenges

Type of Work	Problem	Solution	Locus	Response
Technical	Clearly defined	Clear and known Requires application of procedures and expertise	Led by authority, using expertise	Rational, logical and thorough
Adaptive	Not clear, requires discovery	Unknown Requires learning and innovation	Requires engagement of stakeholders	Impacts, values and emotions

No need for the vision to be specified, but a plan towards its creation is needed

The wider council work will inevitably include a range of different activities that can be done, but that to fulfil the spirit of the EST recommendations they should be enacted in the context of a **shared vision for how problems are diagnosed and solved between residents and councils.**

This could be framed in various ways, depending on the need identified in the Council - anything from a need to conduct meetings more efficiently or productively, or a need for Council workers and residents to feel more comfortable in their working relationships with each other.

Currently, the proposed activities are missing an organising principle - what would success look like in terms of improved relationships? It would be helpful to see commitment from the senior management and leadership of the council to exploring this and allowing the answers to guide the creation and prioritisation of activities.

For example, this could include a **meeting with all different parts of the council including senior management**, to surface and air a clear question that would help identify what success looks like. This could be something like ***"Where do you want to get to in your relationship with residents?"*** This could also take a strengths based approach on what works well, what doesn't, what the barriers are to change, what the benefits and risks of changing are. EST would recommend this to be independently facilitated so that GPT can take part too.

We would also suggest that elected representatives to either join this session, or have their own activity of this kind. If this foundational stage is not done, there may be many undiscovered and different assumptions about what kinds of relationships the council is working towards.

The final response to EST would ideally include steps towards this meeting.

Some prioritisation of activities and a sense of which are most likely to have impact is required

It would be helpful to see the activities themed by the ways they would be improving the council's relationships, with some organising principle where the different aspects of improvement are considered and action is being taken on a number of fronts.

For example. Improving Consultation, or Improving Internal Skills, or Effective Monitoring and Auditing.

Currently there seem to be many activities in train, which is very commendable. We would like to see:

- Which the council judges to be highest impact and most important to do and most likely to catalyse change

- Which are being started already - maybe under other names or in different programmes - which is important to acknowledge, and which will help provide good practice examples.
- How far the senior management and leadership buys into the priority activities towards the vision.

Realistic assessment of ambition and sequencing would be helpful

It would be helpful to see an acknowledgement that if the plan above is not feasible, there might also be plans in train for smaller cycles of ***pilot and learn*** which could be done even without central sponsorship for the agenda.

It seems there are some activities which could act as pilots and we would like to see some thinking about how they could be used to catalyse further activity, for instance the Legislative Theatre case study from Housing Needs.

That then leads the way to sequencing - a plan for how all this is reviewed and progress celebrated. If change is built up via different pilots, how can it be all brought together to a sense that the council is moving in the right direction?

Next steps

We understand that the Grenfell Partnerships Team is already working with the Executive Management Team to consider how to incorporate this into the response to the recommendations.

We have asked to see an updated response following the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 November and will provide a final evaluation of the response thereafter.