

Siân Berry AM

London Assembly
City Hall
Kamal Chunchie Way
London E16 1ZE

via email: sian.berry@london.gov.uk

19th January 2022

Dear Siân,

Re: Carpenters Estate Ballot

I hope you are well, and I look forward welcoming you personally now that City Hall has moved to the Royal Docks in Newham.

In the meantime, I'll be asking colleagues in my office to help us coordinate a meeting to discuss the concerns you have raised in the letter you sent to Civica on the 25th November 2021. In advance of that, I wanted to provide you a response to the allegations of 'unfair practices' that you raised, as regrettably there were many inaccuracies and misrepresentations contained in the letter you sent. I would have been happy to have discussed these matters with you directly at the time you wrote your letter but you didn't reach out.

You should be aware that the [Carpenters Estate masterplan and Landlord Offer](#) put forward during ballot process reflects the positive work that the Council has undertaken with residents living on Carpenters Estate over the past three years through Populo Living, our wholly owned housing delivery company tasked with delivery thousands of desperately needed homes at social rent levels that residents in our borough can afford.

It is one of the most significant estate restoration programmes anywhere in London which will deliver over 2000 homes, and has been shaped through a co-design process that genuinely has had residents at the heart. Now that the majority of eligible residents have voted in favour of the masterplan and Landlord Offer, the long awaited renewal of the estate with much needed homes that are well designed, high quality, sustainable and genuinely affordable can commence.

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It is part of a series of manifesto pledges I made back in May 2018, to end the previous joint venture plans the Council had for the Carpenters Estate and ensure at least fifty percent of homes on the estate will be at social rent levels.

Through the three-year process we have:

- Incorporated many of the ideas and priorities residents have put forward, such as increasing the size of the central open space on the Estate and the number of houses and maisonettes;
- Responded to resident and stakeholder feedback to keep existing homes on the estate, amounting to almost half on the estate presently, with 44 percent retained and restored equating to 314 homes;
- Put forward proposals to retain two of the existing high rises with ambitious plans to refurbish those - symbolic of a move away from the demolition ethos that had prevailed for so many years and in response to the climate emergency we face;
- Designed the masterplan so that nearly everyone has a new home built for them on the estate, enabling them to stay in the community and only have to move once into their new home.

That's why I am pleased that the plan was overwhelmingly supported by 73 percent of eligible residents who voted, and that we achieved a 66.5 percent turnout which is a significantly greater turnout in comparison to other estate ballots held in London. This is indicative of the trust and support we have worked hard to build over the preceding three years between the Council and with residents living on the estate, as well as those that have the right to return.

To emphasise, the consultation and engagement process with eligible residents living on the Carpenters Estate, and those who have the right to return, was undertaken with the highest levels of probity and integrity reflective of the good governance practice that I have instituted at the Council since I was elected the Mayor of Newham.

It was conducted honestly and with genuine transparency in collaboration with residents in line with the co-deign and co-production principals we have put in place throughout all our regeneration schemes we are leading in the borough, as part of a wider agenda of participatory democracy we are pioneering in Newham.

In turn, and in strict adherence with the Estate Ballot rules set out by the GLA, the Carpenters Estate ballot process was conducted independently over November and December 2021 by Civica Election Services with the highest levels of integrity and transparency.

During the ballot process, there were a range of opinions among residents as well as other interest groups not directly affected by the Council's co-designed masterplan proposals. This is understandable because residents had been let down by the Council previously, as in the past it had been intent on pursuing a joint venture regeneration programme with a private developer. Back in November 2018, I publicly announced that this was no longer an option that the Council would pursue and was a formal decision approved by my cabinet at that time.

Regretfully, over the ballot period some individuals and interest groups sought to scaremonger and distress residents into voting 'No' to the proposal. I addressed this in a letter sent to all eligible voters, which I have attached for your information. Additionally, an independent residents' campaign in favour of the Council's co-designed Masterplan and Landlord Offer also sought to address the false claims being made and I have attached a copy of their leaflet for your information as well.

Throughout the three-year resident-led consultation process, I have been clear that residents must have all the information available and that the Council will only proceed with a proposal that residents support. Having worked so closely with residents to develop the Masterplan and Landlord Offer over this period it is entirely appropriate for the Council to be seeking residents' endorsement of the plan **we have jointly developed them**, including directly from me as the Mayor of Newham as well as the Chief Executive of the Council.

There was material publicised in and around the Dovetail Community Hub, which we opened in 2020 on the estate for local residents to use, and again the material was based on information about the masterplan co-developed with residents which is hardly 'biased'. There was no 'paid canvassing' and I am perturbed that you believe that 'pressure tactics' were deployed – this is simply not true.

The Council's Populo Living project team used a wide range of engagement methods to ensure residents had access to all the information to make an informed decision, even if that led them to vote against the proposals.

In summary:

- We promoted the ballot process fairly and with balance to ensure all those who wanted to vote could make their voices heard, including to those who may have voted 'No'.
- The Landlord Offer document is balanced in the information it provides, making it very clear that the commitments set out are legally binding on part of the Council.
- A series of activities and events were organised for residents, reflecting a three-year practice of involvement and engagement with resident activities. This did include an 'Estate Fun Day', which was part of a summer programme of 'fun days' held last year across all Council estates in Newham, not organised simply because of the impending ballot.
- The Dovetail Community Hub was open throughout the ballot period (and for a long period before) to allow residents to drop-in for any further information they needed and have any queries answered by the team.

At no point during the ballot process were these activities in contravention of the GLA's Estate Ballot rules, nor would the Council allow for such contravening activities to happen; and the programme team continuously kept Civica updated including seeking clarification and advice.

I am happy to discuss these aspects further when we meet, but I wanted to conclude by saying this: too many of our families in Newham face housing insecurity in homes they can't afford because of the vagaries of the private rented sector which benefits private landlords at too great a cost to so many of our residents; too many are living in temporary accommodation which is growing day by day because of the cost of living pressures and the impact of Covid-19; and too many of our people are languishing on our housing waiting list for years and years.

That's why the catastrophic housing reality facing too many of our people in Newham is being addressed through a range of approaches and interventions that the Council is pursuing under my administration, because as the Mayor of Newham I have a moral duty to respond; and the Carpenters Estate proposals now approved by residents who voted 'Yes' is an important contribution to that.

It will provide 2,175 homes, of which fifty percent will be social rent and fifty percent will be private or intermediate housing - with an overall position of more than fifty percent being genuinely affordable.

I trust you welcome that and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rokhsana Fiaz'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz OBE