Annex 1

Annual Appraisal of Kingston Residents Scrutiny Panel (KRiSP)

Executive Summary

KRiSP has produced 6 service investigations with both realised and potential impact for the Council in terms of additional income, efficiencies and validation. As such it fulfils the regulatory requirements on the Council for a Tenant Scrutiny Panel and represent Value for Money (VfM) for the Council. A review of the Terms of Reference (ToR) is overdue.

Recruiting more members, and a wider range of members, was the most consistent theme in the interviews. Some KRiSP members felt that meetings need to be more inclusive of all members and not be distracted by pet topics. The position of Chair is important and a succession strategy should be put in place to ensure this remains filled in the medium term.

Holding investigations alongside, or close to, other reviews should be avoided. Evidence remains critical to support report recommendations. The Council needs to accept ownership of reports and recommendations. Turnover of staff means that awareness of KRiSP could be improved.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – that a review of the ToR takes place, including addressing concerns and issues raised in this report. This to be led by an independent person and include officers and KRiSP as well as a discussion with the Lead Member.

This review should cover the following areas:

- Number of Investigation meetings during service investigations
- KRiSP commissioning work and training from Pinnacle
- The involvement of the designated Lead Policy Officer for each investigation in the Findings Meeting
- How best recommendations are drafted, agreed and monitored
- Chair Succession strategy
- Officer support for KRiSP.

Recommendation 2 - that following the review of the ToR that KRiSP has a meeting to confirm the ToR, including its approach to meetings and investigations.

Recommendation 3 - that a recruitment exercise take place after the new ToR are agreed, both for new members and people to join the next investigation. Exit interviews to be held with departing KRiSP members.

Recommendation 4 – following the review of the ToR, and to help support recruitment of new members, workshops are held for staff about KRiSP and its role.
Background

1. KRiSP was set up in early 2014. KRiSP currently comprises 9 members, 7 of whom were recruited in 2014, and 2 recruited in 2015. Two members have recently resigned.

2. It is governed by an overarching ToR, most recently amended in 2015, with an outstanding review from 2016. This is backed up by a suite of 9 other agreed documents, at least some of which are either out of date or in need or review.

3. To date KRiSP has completed 6 Service Investigations covering Garages, Service Charges, Complaints, the Contact Centre, Parking and Responsive Repairs.

4. The existence of KRiSP is also governed by the Regulatory Framework published by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The role of Scrutiny Panels was emphasised in 2012 by Government Ministers, following the passing of the Localism Act 2011. There is a requirement on Kingston Council to set up and support a scrutiny panel, and to respond to its proposals in a constructive and timely way. HCA, in its most recent review of consumer regulation stated as its first message that:

   Boards and councillors are responsible for meeting the consumer standards. Although the Regulator regulates the consumer standards reactively, that does not lessen the obligation on registered providers to comply.

5. Failure to maintain, or support, or respond to a scrutiny panel could leave Kingston Council open to regulatory intervention and publication of a regulatory notice.

Methodology

6. For this review the following were considered:
   a. ToR suite of 10 documents
   b. All 6 Service Investigation reports
   c. Update report on progress on all six reports to HsC January 2017
   d. Interviews with:
      i. Cllr Roberts
      ii. Cllr Bamford
      iii. Cllr Cottington
      iv. Robert Johnson
      v. Theresa Mayers
      vi. Five officer leads for Service Investigations
      vii. All KRiSP members including the Chair and Vice Chair appraisal
   e. Costs for KRiSP
   f. Annual STAR survey.

Value for Money (VfM) and Impact

7. The cost of KRiSP in the past year was £11,600, against a budget of £20,000. However, this is on the low side as there has been no training in the past year, which would be needed if new members were recruited.

8. The 2016/17 budget included the following:
9. These costs for KRiSP are modest for a scrutiny panel of its size and activity. As with all budgets these should be subject to review, and there may be areas where staff time could replace consultant time.

10. There is some clear impact arising from the KRiSP Investigations over the past three years. These are covered in more depth in Annex 1, but highlights include the following:
   a. Additional net income of £200K from garages
   b. Additional 120 garages available for residents to rent
   c. New Services Charges’ policy in place (there was no policy previously) and Handbook
   d. Correction of wrong information about the Local Government Ombudsman regarding complaints.

11. Issues outside of KRiSP’s control have restricted impact. This has resulted in a failure to implement at least 20 of the accepted recommendations from 5 prior investigations. These are a source of frustration for KRiSP, reduces their impact and creates tension with the Council and include:
   a. IT system
   b. The LB Kingston website
   c. Housing Handbooks
   d. Telephony
   e. New CRM system
   f. Staff turnover
   g. Failure to complete the agreed new complaints handbook on time
   h. Failure to complete upgrading of first-time fixes to complaints on time.

12. KRiSP’s work also provides validation for the Council around issues they were aware of, and had in hand, but provides the reassurance that these were also issues of concern to residents. This includes the Contact Centre, Parking and Responsive Repairs’ investigations.

13. Finally KRiSP continues to identify areas of concern for the Council. These include issues with the robustness of policies and procedures, a consistent theme in their reports, and the ability to identify wider issues regarding efficiency and VfM.

14. Overall given the cost of KRiSP and the outcomes, both realised and potential, in their work, they represent value for money.

Annual Appraisal of KRiSP
Issues raised during the review

15. The reputation of KRiSP is generally good. The members are seen to work hard, are dedicated, have unearthed issues of concern to the Council and are sensible and mature people.

16. During the past 3 years there have been a number of changes – the Council has changed administration and governance arrangements around housing, and the relationship with the Kingston Federation of Residents (known as the Fed) has ceased. There has also been some learning about investigations that this review has captured. The suite of documents that make up the ToR are now unwieldy and cumbersome and a review of the ToR is well overdue.

17. There are challenges from different directions. These include the following:
   a. Current arrangements for access to staff and information
   b. Costs of KRiSP
   c. That the new governance arrangements should be fully embraced
   d. That the new relationship with Pinnacle through the resident engagement team should be utilised
   e. The need for a Equality and Diversity check for all reports
   f. Recruitment for members to be officer led
   g. Location and refreshments for meetings.

18. At the same time KRiSP members are keen to ensure that their independent role to pick topics and investigate without encumbrance continues to be recognised.

19. **Recommendation 1** – that a review of the ToR takes place including addressing concerns and issues raised in this report. This to be led by an independent person and include officers and KRiSP as well as a discussion with the Lead Member.

**KRiSP**

20. Although well-intended KRiSP members are unhappy with the separate meetings between the KRiSP Chair and Vice Chair and this has caused more disharmony than necessary.

21. KRiSP meetings, whilst generally well chaired, do allow some men on the Panel to dominate meetings whilst not allowing the full range of contributions from members. Whilst the overall view of KRiSP and its members is positive some comments to staff along the way have clearly rankled. KRiSP will want to reflect on how its meetings are run and to ensure that its otherwise high levels of professionalism are maintained.

22. **Recommendation 2** – that, following the review of the ToR, KRiSP has a meeting to confirm the ToR, including its approach to meetings and investigations.
Membership

23. Work with other scrutiny panels show a high level of turnover and a need for repeated recruitment. KRiSP is unusual in that it has maintained a very high level of continuity in its membership – a tribute to how well the members have worked with each other and the Council. However, the two recent resignations have exposed the need for further recruitment. It would be worth holding exit interviews with any departing KRiSP members to see what reasons were given.

24. Recruiting more members, and a wider range of members, was the most consistent theme in the interviews. The comparatively narrow age range was noted and concern expressed that, whilst the current approach might work for existing members, it might, inadvertently, be off-putting for others. Existing members, too, commented on the workload during investigations.

25. That means reviewing the approach during investigations to reduce the need for catch-up meetings during investigations to one or none. It also means drawing on experience from elsewhere of inviting active or interested residents to join an individual review (subject to some screening and training) or to take part in individual activities.

26. It also means exploring the Council’s relationship with Pinnacle and identifying how KRiSP can commission work and training from Pinnacle to reduce the burden during investigations whilst maintaining KRiSP’s control.

27. Recommendation 3 - that a recruitment exercise take place after the new ToR are agreed, both for new members and people to join the next review. Exit interviews should be held with departing KRiSP members.

28. Investigation meetings during service investigations would be included as part of the review of the ToR.

29. KRiSP commissioning work and training from Pinnacle would be included as part of the review of the ToR.

Staff Awareness

30. When KRiSP was set up there were a number of workshops for housing staff to explain their role. These were regarded as successful. Whilst there have been some approaches (including currently) to maintain this the high turnover of staff means that awareness could be improved. Staff can also be a valuable resource for recruitment campaigns through their knowledge of residents.

31. Recommendation 4 – following the review of the ToR and to help support recruitment of new members, workshops are held for staff about KRiSP and its role.
Service Investigations

32. Although these have gone generally well there was some useful feedback about how these might be improved. Where the Council was either conducting a review, or had just finished one (including Internal Audit) then a service investigation might be untimely. This does place a premium on KRiSP being made aware where this may be an issue, and future timings if a review was deferred.

33. Given the most recent set of KPIs it is likely that KRiSP will continue to identify areas for investigation going forward.

34. There was also useful feedback about the importance of gaining understanding at the beginning of investigations. In most part this is already covered by the presentation at the scoping meeting.

35. The need for robust evidence was emphasised. This means surveys need to cover a good sample (see earlier comments about Pinnacle) and good triangulation of evidence to back up findings and evidence.

36. The Findings Meeting is a key opportunity for the Investigation Panel to consider and agree evidence. A detailed evidence table backs this up. However, there was some concern that this part of the Review did not involve the Lead Officer who would be able to help ensure the evidence was robust and informed.

37. This might help with the comparatively high number of recommendations that are not or partially accepted. It should also help with the ability for the designated Lead Policy Officer to take ownership of the resulting Action Plan.

38. Currently there is a 'step' whereby the Housing Management Team consider the draft report and offer comments on it. This should remain. Equality and diversity was also raised during this review and whether the draft report should be shared with the Equality and Diversity Officer. It would be worth considering this issue further.

39. The involvement of the Lead Policy Officer for the investigation in the Findings Meeting would be included as part of the review of the ToR.

Implementation and Monitoring

40. There has been a marked lack of progress in implementing agreed recommendations. Many of these are due to issues outside of housing management and/or linked to longer-term issues. This does cause profound frustration for KRiSP members and is the biggest cause of tension in the mostly good relationship with the Council. Resolving this would remove that tension and increase the impact of KRiSP’s for the Council.

41. Involvement of the Lead Policy Officer for each review at the findings stage should help with tightening up the report and resulting Action Plan so that dates for agreed recommendations are realistic and deliverable. It is important that a mechanism is identified that allows KRiSP findings to be realised as agreed recommendations for the Council, and are implemented and monitored by the Council.

42. How best recommendations are drafted, agreed, and monitored would be included as part of the review of the ToR.

Annual Appraisal of KRiSP
Chair and Vice Chair Appraisal

43. As part of this review, appraisals were carried out of the KRiSP Chair and Vice Chair. Both are hard-working, dedicated and enthusiastic about KRiSP. There is no appetite for change within KRiSP at the moment and continuity would certainly help during the review of the ToR. Any areas for personal development were included in their appraisals.

44. That said, the lack of an obvious successor to Chair is a wider concern and the recruitment proposed at Recommendation 3 should also help identify potential candidates for Chair. I have discussed the adoption of a succession strategy being in place, with both the Chair and Vice Chair, and both agree that this should happen. It might be worth considering a time limit for Chair during the review of the ToR.

45. The possibility of an external chair was raised during the review. This would be a last resort if no candidate from KRiSP members was forthcoming. The Council would also have to consider the issue of payment as the Chair is currently unpaid.

46. A Chair succession strategy would be included as part of the review of the ToR.

Training and Support

47. Given that this is an experienced Panel, and that they have already identified holding focus groups as their next training session, there is little to report in terms of additional training needs. The recruitment of new members will mean training on the role of KRiSP and holding Service Reviews.

48. The support given to KRiSP is welcome and valued. It allows them to operate successfully. This should be covered in the review of the ToR to ensure that the right level of officer and administrative support is available.

Acknowledgements

49. I would like to thank all my interviewees for giving up their time and offering their views so freely. I have not sought to identify individual contributions in this report but to capture the salient points. I would particularly like to thank Theresa Mayers for organising the interviews and collating the various reports.

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