

**Housing, Finance and Corporate
Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Briefing**

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Author: Councillor Rachael Robathan

Portfolio: Housing

Please contact: Daniella Bonfanti
dbonfanti@westminster.gov.uk

1. Fire & Gas Safety

Fire risk assessments

- 1.1 Frankham RMS has now completed all 21 extra high-level Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) commissioned by CityWest Homes (CWH). From April, the outcomes of these assessments, along with any corrective actions, will be communicated to residents.
- 1.2 From May 2018, residents will receive a copy of the FRA actions for their building for all new assessments that take place.
- 1.3 A campaign focusing on fire prevention will soon be launched, providing advice and guidance on what to do in the event of fire in the home and outlining the responsibilities that leaseholders have to keep their properties safe.

Fire Doors

- 1.4 All common area fire doors will be inspected as will a 10% sample of resident's front doors. This programme of inspection will cover 261 buildings all of which are over six storeys; all inspections will be completed by July 2018.
- 1.5 Members of CWH's Fire Risk Assessment Team have now all attained Fire Door Inspector certification, and will be completing door surveys in conjunction with FRAs.

Sprinklers

- 1.6 Following the Policy and Scrutiny committee on 15 January 2018, a cross-party task group has been established to examine all options for the retrofit of sprinklers in tower blocks.

Street Properties

- 1.7 As part of the on-going review of fire safety precautions, the installation of emergency lighting and communal smoke detection systems in street properties of three storeys and above has been brought forward. The programme was previously scheduled to take over three years to complete but will now be completed this year.
- 1.8 Oakray, a specialist mechanical and electrical services contractor has been commissioned to survey approximately 360 street properties to identify which should be fitted with emergency lighting and communal smoke detection systems. Allowing time for Section 20 consultation, work should start on site from April 2018, and the programme should be completed before the end of the year. Properties with the highest risk profile will be treated as a priority.

Large Panel System (LPS) construction

- 1.9 Bryan Packman Marcel (BPM) has now completed all precautionary checks to the 23 gas supplied LPS constructed blocks within Lisson Green estate and five tower blocks in Little Venice.
- 1.10 BPM's findings confirm the veracity of the City Council's original reports from 1991, which state that the blocks are safe and structurally sound. Residents' have been advised and no further action is required.

Little Venice towers

- 1.11 The outer cladding panels have been safely removed from all six Little Venice towers. As a result, the evacuation strategy returned to 'Stay Put' in January 2018 and the fire warden patrols have now ceased.
- 1.12 Over the next 6 weeks, the building will be prepared for re-cladding which is expected to commence in April. The replacement cladding panel "Alucobond A2" is rated the safest of its type being impact-resistant, break-proof, weatherproof and low combustible.
- 1.13 Residents continue to receive regular updates on fire safety works via letter and remain supported and reassured by on-site staff and weekly drop-in sessions.

Fire Safety Communications

- 1.14 General fire safety updates and copies of the latest communications sent to residents are available on the CWH website.

Regeneration

Ebury Bridge

- 1.1 The new Regeneration Base opened on the 21st February. The space has hosted a number of events including refurbishment and viability workshops, a launch exhibition of progress to date (with over 60 stakeholders in attendance) and a meeting with Ebury Bridge business owners. The Base will provide additional housing management services with an officer from City West Homes based at the office to assist residents.
- 1.2 On Saturday 10th March, residents of Ebury Bridge accompanied by the Design Team, visited Copley Close in Ealing. Copley Close provides a mixture of new build and refurbished properties. The visit gave residents the opportunity to talk with Copley Close residents about their experience.
- 1.3 The Ebury Bridge Community Futures Group has appointed an independent Chairwoman, Teresa Wickham. Teresa brings experience of working in both local and national government as well as in retail. The Group will now operate from the Regeneration Base and will continue to influence key decisions around the project.
- 1.4 Over the next few months, the Engagement Team will continue to talk with residents about the eight potential renewal scenarios and the logistics, impact and costs of each scheme. To provide a framework to future consultation the Community Futures Group will look to agree a residents Charter with both the City Council and fellow residents.

Tollgate Gardens

- 1.5 Construction remains on schedule to be completed by Spring 2019. The first homes will be handed over to the City Council in advance of this and are expected to be let by early 2019 with officers already in contact with returning residents. The new community centre is also progressing well and is due to be completed by November 2018.
- 1.6 Tollgate House will benefit from communal improvement works, including a new entrance and installation of new balustrades.
- 1.7 To provide additional support for residents during the redevelopment programme, a dedicated community engagement resource has been in place since late 2017.

Infill Programme

- 1.8 The City Council has received planning permission for a further two infill sites that will deliver 12 new social homes. Both schemes will see the demolition of under-utilised

garages to provide much needed affordable family homes. These homes will be available to let within 2018/19.

- 1.9 These projects are part of an evolving infill programme, which will deliver over 200 homes in the next 5 years. The first of which will be delivered by the end of March 2018.

2. Affordable Housing

- 2.1 Since 31 March 2017, 92 new build affordable homes have been delivered in Westminster. This includes 62 affordable homes delivered by private developers under their housing obligations on s106 sites.
- 2.2 Westminster Community Homes (WCH) has also delivered 30 new build affordable homes at their schemes in Ladbroke Grove and the Mozart Estate. WCH has also purchased three additional homes on the open market for affordable housing use.
- 2.3 The City Council, through City West Homes, has also secured 20 new affordable homes on the open market for social rent as part of our self- financing initiative. The City Council has also purchased 18 properties in Westminster for homeless households and four homes for intermediate households.

Westminster Community Homes (WCH) – Change in Governance

- 2.4 The Housing and Planning Act 2016 makes provision for the restriction of local authority control of registered providers.
- 2.5 As a result, Westminster Community Homes (WCH) has now become a wholly controlled subsidiary of the City Council. Both the WCH Board and shareholders have approved these changes.
- 2.6 The revised rules have been sent to the Financial Conduct Authority for registration and the changes will come into effect from the 1st April.

3. Housing Policy

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

- 3.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a new duty on local authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people. The City Council's Housing Options Service continues to prepare for the new changes, ready for implementation on 3rd April.

- 3.2 To support local authorities in delivering their new legislative duties, the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government has published a Code of Guidance. This sets out how authorities should carry out their homelessness functions under the new law.

Strengthening consumer redress in the housing market – Consultation

- 3.3 This consultation, which closes on the 16th April 2018, seeks views on redress for housing tenants and covers the following issues:
- the current complaints and redress landscape, how it is working and if more can be done to improve it;
 - what standards and services should be expected of a redress scheme/an ombudsman;
 - how to fill the existing gaps between current services;
 - whether a single ombudsman service is needed to simplify access to redress across housing, and if so, what form that should take and what its remit should be.

Draft London Plan

- 3.4 The City Council has submitted a response to the Mayor's draft London Plan. The Plan sets out the Mayor's policy proposals for the spatial development of London until 2041.
- 3.5 On housing, it sets a 10 year (2019-29) housing delivery target for Westminster of 10,100 homes (1,010 per annum) of which it is expected that 5,290 (529 per annum) will come from small sites of less than 0.25 hectares.
- 3.6 The approach the draft takes to affordable housing has already been trailed in the Mayor's draft Housing Strategy and his Supplementary Planning Document on Affordable Housing and Viability reported to previous meetings. It sets a strategic London wide target for 50% of all new homes to be affordable with an approach to viability that seeks to incentivise provision of 35% or more (50% on public land).
- 3.7 The tenure split proposed for new affordable housing is:
- 30% to be low cost rent
 - 30% to be intermediate (The Mayor's preferred products are London Living Rent and shared ownership)
 - 40% to be determined by the borough in line with local needs
- 3.8 Intermediate rent should be affordable to households with incomes of up to £60k and ownership products to households with incomes of up to £90k. Boroughs can set local eligibility criteria, but these should not apply to relets and resales of intermediate housing.

4. Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Housing Options

- 5.1 The Housing Options Service has successfully launched a partnership between Shelter, the Passage and Places for People. Given the significant change the Homelessness Reduction Act brings, officers are working with the lead contractor, Places for People (PfP) to develop new systems and a workforce development strategy to meet the expectations of the Act.
- 5.2 We are confident that our model for the newly commissioned service puts the City Council on a strong footing to meet the requirements of the Act; particularly given the focus on a holistic assessment of a person's needs.

Rough Sleeping

- 5.3 Westminster City Council officers, alongside Connections at St Martins and the Police, completed the most recent street count on the 22nd February. The **draft** figures are as follows:
- **Total: 219**
 - UK & Irish: 87
 - EEA: 85
 - Rest of the World: 17
 - Not known: 30
- 5.4 Early indications show that rough sleeping has increased although the figures are still to be verified. This increase is predominately down to a rise in the number of EEA nationals sleeping rough in the city. Traditionally the City Council has struggled to achieve outcomes for this group; this is largely due to changes to Housing Benefit, which disallowed a claim unless the individual had 'worker' status'.
- 5.5 In Quarter three our commissioned hostels saw one person move on towards independence every three days. Following increased work with prisons and hospitals, seven people were assessed and supported from the institution into a bed space rather than being discharged on to the street.
- 5.6 The Passage House Assessment Centre resettled 57 individuals in Quarter three, demonstrating that the new service is working well.

Domestic Violence

5.7 Domestic violence (DV) affects people from all parts of society, including rough sleepers. In order to bring the two sectors together an ambitious cross sector project is currently being developed in Westminster.

During the last quarter, the project has delivered:

- Specialist training for Rough Sleeping officers on Domestic Violence;
- training on working with perpetrators of DV in homelessness settings;
- a series of multi-agency reflective practice sessions discussing the most complex situations;
- bespoke safety planning tools designed for women on the street and in hostel situations;
- a dedicated rough sleeping representative attending all MARACs

Prevention Trailblazer

5.8 In late February the team trialled their first surgeries and drops-ins at community sites across Westminster and the response from residents and workers has been positive.

5.9 There has been significant progress with all four strands of research. Extensive GiS (Heat) mapping of Westminster is nearly complete, showing the density of presentations to Housing Options Service (HOS) over 2017 by geographic location, type of applicant, application type, tenancy type and household size. This data maps areas of highest need and provides a benchmark for evaluation.

5.10 The first phase of ethnographic research has also been completed. Key findings include the need to highlight a pathway from the private rented sector to Housing Options; the need to ask the right questions in order to identify key issues and find effective solutions; the need for clear and honest messaging from housing and advice providers.

5.11 Officers continue to lead the Prevention Working Group to ensure sharing of best practice, avoidance of duplication, consistent messaging and an effective triage. The Prevention Team are working with the Performance and Evaluation team to conduct in-depth mapping of wider prevention work across the City Council and to evaluate the efficiency of the service.

Mental Health Support

5.12 On May 16th 2018, Westminster's Hoarding and Self-Neglect Protocol will be relaunched by a cross-departmental team from Adult Social Care, Housing and Residential Environmental Health. The emphasis of the re-launch will be focused

predominantly towards interventions with clients who display a Hoarding and Self Neglect support need from a mental health perspective,

Provision of Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households

- 5.13 The total numbers of households in Temporary Accommodation (TA) is 2,506. Just under 50% of TA continues to be provided in borough. Of those located outside of Westminster over a quarter are located in London boroughs with less than 100 properties outside London, principally in Essex.
- 5.14 Use of non-self-contained accommodation continues to fall and where it remains necessary is used for only short periods of time.

Use of Private Rented Sector: discharge of duty

- 5.15 Since the beginning of the year over 75 households have moved into the private rented sector as a formal discharge of the Council's statutory housing duty, confirming that the properties are suitable in terms of size, location and affordability following a detailed assessment of each individual household.

St. Mungo's Outreach Service

- 5.16 A new partnership between Westminster City Council and St Mungo's, a leading homeless charity, will launch on the 1st April. This partnership will see an increase in street-based support to tackle rough sleeping.
- 5.17 As part of the service, St Mungo's will introduce a volunteer-led First Response team. Volunteers will work in pairs to respond rapidly to referrals from StreetLink and other sources. All the volunteer roles will be trained to high standards and will add capacity to street shifts, bringing a range of different personalities, languages, and experiences to meet the challenge of an ever-changing profile of rough sleeping in Westminster.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

- 5.18 In response to the extreme cold weather experienced by much of the country over the last month, the City Council has activated our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).
- 5.19 Outreach services worked alongside volunteers to encourage people inside and our night centre and commissioned supported housing extended their offer of support to

maximum capacity with the three main day centres in Westminster extending their hours. Many other community organisations came together to offer an unprecedented response to the cold weather. In total an additional 365 spaces were found across Westminster providing those in need with a warm and safe environment.

- 5.20 The response provided meant that we were able to offer spaces to people outside of Westminster as part of the Pan-London SWEP provision offered by the Mayor of London

5. CityWest Homes (CWH)

Resident Communications

- 6.1 Since launching 'City Voice', a new monthly online resident newsletter in November, the number of opens and clicks has increased with each edition published. The newsletter is sent to tenants and lessees for whom CWH holds email addresses. Those who wish to receive it can sign up on CWH's website.
- 6.2 For tenants who do not have internet access a supplementary magazine is sent three times a year. This is also available in the Area Service Centres and online to ensure no resident is excluded from service information, updates and opportunities.

Repairs performance

- 6.3 Last year CWH appointed Morgan Sindall Property Service to deliver repairs and maintenance across all of its properties.
- 6.4 Morgan Sindall has now cleared the backlog of outstanding repairs inherited from the previous contractor and has introduced an improved reporting system that allows customers to choose from morning or afternoon appointments at the point of registering a repair.
- 6.5 Customer satisfaction with the repairs service improved from 68% in January to 77% in February 2018.