



City of Westminster

Committee Agenda

Title: **Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting Date: **Monday 16th November, 2020**

Time: **6.00 pm**

Venue: **This meeting will take place virtually**

Members: **Councillors:**

Gotz Mohindra (Chairman)	Adam Hug
Susie Burbridge	Guthrie McKie
Lorraine Dean	Matt Noble
Murad Gassanly	Emily Payne

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion Part 1 of the Agenda.



If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Officer, Toby Howes, Senior Committee and Governance Officer.

**Tel: 07815 663854; Email: thowes@westminster.gov.uk
Corporate Website: www.westminster.gov.uk**

Note for Members: Members are reminded that Officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and Members are welcome to raise questions in advance of the meeting. With regard to item 2, guidance on declarations of interests is included in the Code of Governance; if Members and Officers have any particular questions they should contact the Head of Committee and Governance Services in advance of the meeting please.

AGENDA

PART 1 (IN PUBLIC)

1. MEMBERSHIP

To note any changes to the membership.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of interest by Members and Officers of any pecuniary Interest or any other significant interest in matters on this agenda.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of 17 September 2020 are attached.

(Pages 5 - 10)

4. CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND REGENERATION UPDATE

The report is attached,

(Pages 11 - 16)

5. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE

The report is attached.

(Pages 17 - 30)

6. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT WESTMINSTER

The report is attached.

(Pages 31 - 36)

7. WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

The Work Programme and Action Tracker for 2020-2021 are attached.

(Pages 37 - 42)

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

To consider any other business which the Chairman considers urgent.

**Stuart Love
Chief Executive
9 November 2020**

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CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 12th September, 2019**, Rooms 18.01 and 18.03, 18th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Richard Elcho, Adam Hug, Matt Noble, Mark Shearer, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Guthrie McKie and James Spencer.

Also Present: Councillor Rachael Robathan (Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration), Councillor Andrew Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services), Barbara Brownlee (Executive Director - Growth, Planning and Housing), Neil Wightman (Director of Housing), Greg Ward (Director of Regeneration and Economic Development), David Hodgkinson (Director of Corporate Finance and Property), Aaron Hardy (Policy and Scrutiny Manager) and Toby Howes (Senior Committee and Governance Officer).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Guthrie McKie was a newly appointed Member on the Committee, replacing Councillor Pancho Lewis.
- 1.2 It was noted that Councillor Elizabeth Hitchcock was replacing Councillor Antonia Cox.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Richard Elcho declared that he has undertaken unpaid pro bono work for the Free Representation Unit, who he would refer to in relation to item 4 in the agenda.

3 MINUTES

3.1 RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record of proceedings.

4 CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND REGENERATION UPDATE

- 4.1 Councillor Rachael Robathan (Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration) highlighted the success of the event “Ebury on Sea” at Ebury Bridge that had taken place in August. There had been a positive mood at the event, with the community fully engaged. The Futures Group was also providing considerable input in helping to shape the regeneration of Ebury Bridge.
- 4.2 The Committee sought an update in respect of the Fair Funding Review and the Spending Review. It was asked in what ways the Budget Task Group could assist and what processes would be involved in setting the Budget. Members welcomed the 200 homes allocated for the Infill Programme and asked when the first new homes would be built. An update was sought on how much money had been raised to date in respect of the Community Contribution. With regard to the London Living Wage (LLW), Members asked what steps were being taken to improve contract monitoring to ensure that external organisations were adhering to what they had promised to undertake and could the Council insist that the LLW be mandatory for all new contracts. An update was also sought in respect of the review of W/C provision.
- 4.3 Members enquired how the housing developments impacted upon temporary accommodation in Westminster and was a residents’ ballot being considered in respect of the Ebury Bridge renewal project. Updates were sought in respect of Farm Street, proposals involving the Jubilee Community Sports Centre, Cosway Street, Beechcroft and whether negotiations with regard to Luton Street had resulted in any material changes to the scheme. A Member welcomed the support the Council and Westminster Citizens’ Advice Bureau was providing for residents. He asked whether the Council could do more to build bridges between residents and pro bono organisations like the Free Representation Unit, which provided residents with support for their benefit appeals.
- 4.5 In reply to the issues raised, Councillor Robathan advised that the Fair Funding Review would not be completed this year, whilst there were no major implications for the Council in respect of the Spending Review. The Council was continuing with its three year savings plans, taking a strategic approach. In respect of the Infill Programme, some new homes had already opened and a further set of homes were shortly due to go to the planning permission stage. Good engagement between the Council, ward councillors and residents was also taking place in helping to move this programme forward. The number of families on housing waiting lists in Westminster was a real issue, and every effort was being made to provide as much affordable housing as possible. With regard to Ebury Bridge, Councillor Robathan stated that the ongoing consultation and engagement with residents was more productive and more fruitful than a one-off ballot.
- 4.6 Councillor Robathan advised that around £800,000 had been collected from the Community Contribution to date. Councillor Robathan stated that every effort was being made to promote implementation of the LLW. She advised

that steps would be taken to ensure that contract monitoring was as robust as possible and organisations would be informed that it would be expected that they would implement the LLW for staff for organisations who had contracts with the Council, however legally the Council could not make the LLW mandatory. The need to provide community W/Cs was recognised, however some had closed due to assaults on staff and anti-social uses. The W/C review was being finalised and Members would be updated on this. The Committee heard that the development at Farm Street had been delayed due to issues to be resolved with the contractors, whilst 19 affordable homes would be onsite at the Jubilee Sports Centre by the end of the year. In respect of Luton Street, a 50/50 split agreement had been agreed with the developer, however the allocation would remain unchanged. Councillor Robathan advised that the homes at Beechcroft were being soft marketed and there had been a number of expressions of interest. Further consideration would also take place in respect of working with community organisations supporting residents with benefits issues.

5 CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE

- 5.1 Members had before them an update from Councillor Andrew Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing Services). The Committee sought further information in respect of progress on fire doors and sprinklers, including fire doors in tower blocks. In respect of the consultation underway for the process of issuing leaseholder bills, Members asked what would happen to those leaseholders who had already received their bills. Members asked what criteria was used in respect of prioritising major works. Details were also sought on the Section 20 process in relation to providing estimated major works charges.
- 5.2 Members welcomed the steps being taken on homelessness prevention and asked if the main causes of homelessness in Westminster had been identified. In addition, Members enquired if there were any preparations in helping homeless people with the onset of winter. In noting the number of people in temporary accommodation, a Member asked why a substantial amount of accommodation being built would be available at market rates. It was also asked why there was no mention of customers in the five key priorities set out for Housing Services. Another Member welcomed progress on implementing traffic management orders and asked how many orders were now in place.
- 5.3 In reply, Councillor Smith advised that consultation with leaseholders regarding fire doors was taking place as part of the major works planning. There was also a specific fire door programme in respect of tower blocks. With regard to prioritising major works, Councillor Smith advised that consideration was given as to what was viewed as most urgent and steps were being taken to ensure that access to sites happened earlier. Councillor Smith commented that there was a focus on early intervention in tackling homelessness and there was on-going consultation in developing the Homelessness Strategy. Councillor Smith added that there was a cold weather protocol in place in respect of homelessness. Members heard that 1,850 new affordable homes were planned for Westminster and residents on

the housing list would also receive support in finding long term accommodation in the private sector.

5.4 Neil Wightman (Director of Housing) advised that there was every intention to ensure that Housing Services was customer focused and this would be made more clear in future communication.

5.5 **ACTIONS:**

1. How much parking enforcement has been rolled out on former CityWest Homes estates under the Traffic Management Orders programme to date and what is the completion date for the programme. (Action: Sam Swales [Project Manager] and Kevin Goad [Director of City Highways].)
2. Briefing note to be sent to Councillor Matt Noble on the Section 20 process. (Action: Neil Wightman [Director of Housing Services].)
3. Provide a timeline for the Council acquiring property and an update on the property acquired to date, to be provided in the next update. (Action: Gemma Stanton [Cabinet Officer].)
4. Reply to be provided on Councillor Richard Elcho's query raised at the previous meeting on the use of drop keys at Orsett Terrace in Bayswater. (Action: Neil Wightman [Director of Housing].)

6 PROGRESS ON HOUSING AND REGENERATION

- 6.1 Barbara Brownlee (Executive Director, Growth, Planning and Housing) introduced the item and emphasised the Council's commitment to building quality housing and to regenerate estates. This included a commitment to build 1,850 affordable homes and she was confident that this target would be met.
- 6.2 Greg Ward (Director of Regeneration and Economic Development) then gave a presentation on this item and set out the design principles and potential delivery models in achieving the housing and regeneration objectives. During the course of the presentation, he emphasised that consultation and community engagement were vital in helping to shape future housing and regeneration in Westminster.
- 6.3 During discussions, Members commented on the need to increase intermediate housing and the importance of changing direction in situations where projects were not making headway. Members stressed the need to encourage key workers to take up intermediate housing and asked why the Council had not applied for Greater London Authority (GLA) funding for regeneration schemes. Further consideration needed to be given to ensure that more Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding was provided on site. Members commented of the need to protect independent shopkeepers by not increasing business rates. It was also asked how confident was the Council in achieving the schemes listed in the appendices of the report.

6.4 In reply, Councillor Robathan advised that schemes were monitored closely throughout the process. Problems were more likely to be encountered where schemes were developer led because of market conditions, however an increasing number of schemes were now being self-delivered which gave the Council more control over progressing them. Councillor Robathan acknowledged the need for intermediate properties and to help attract and maintain key workers and families in the area. She also acknowledged that every opportunity obtain funding wherever possible, including CIL funding and other funding streams and also to increase the ratio of affordable housing.

6.5 Barbara Brownlee advised that a number of schemes were already underway and that she was confident that the large schemes would be delivered. Every effort was also being made to attract key workers to Westminster.

6.6 **ACTION:**

- What were the specific reasons why the Council did not apply for GLA funding that was £100,000 per unit for regeneration schemes. (Action for: Neil Wightman [Director of Housing]) and Barbara Brownlee [Executive Director – Growth, Planning and Housing]).

7 WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

7.1 The Committee noted the Work Programme and Action Tracker. The Chairman stated that the Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group was nearing completion of its work and a Major Works Task Group was due to commence by the end of October.

7.2 Aaron Hardy (Policy and Scrutiny Manager) advised that a review of Housing Management Services would be considered at the next meeting in November.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

8.1 The Committee considered the call-in of a confidential report Cabinet Member report with officers' response on the disposal of homes where decisions had recently been taken.

8.2 Following discussions of the call-in, the Committee agreed that the decisions of the Cabinet Members be endorsed.

The Meeting ended at 9.07 pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____

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Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Monday 16 November 2020
The Report Of:	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Report Author and Contact Details:	Gemma Stanton, Cabinet Officer gstanton@westminster.gov.uk

This report seeks to update the committee on matters pertaining to the Finance, Property and Regeneration portfolio focusing on:

1. COVID-19: Response and Recovery; and
2. Operational Updates.

1. COVID-19: RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

1.1 REGENERATION PROGRAMME

1.1.1 CHURCH STREET

The Church Street Regeneration Team has worked closely with Public Health to ensure that we are doing everything we can to encourage compliance to government guidelines. Our Community Development team will be going out on Thursday, Friday and Saturday of each week to hand out face masks to people in the market and reminding the public of the latest guidance.

1.2 REVENUE AND BENEFITS

Following on from the report submitted to the committee in September, we have now paid out all 492 available Discretionary Grants to business across Westminster. As a reminder, this scheme was devised to align with the Government's priority areas and offered £10,000 per business fully funded by the Government. As a Council, we received 1500 applications for the 492 available grants.

The Council continues to administer new applications under the Government's 'Enhanced Retail, Hospitality and Leisure scheme'. This has resulted in nearly £1billion of relief being awarded, which reduces the annual collectable national non-domestic rates (NNDR) debit from £2.4billion to £1.4billion.

The Council's Revenue and Benefit's team supported payment facilities to enable purchasing, monitoring and reconciliations of spend on essential food supplies by staff and volunteers, for shielding residents. Approximately £18,000 worth of food shopping was purchased, of which £14,000 was refunded by residents.

From 28 September 2020, a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 was made available for residents that are self-isolating because of COVID-19, and are either employed or self-employed. The payment is to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by

NHS Test and Trace and lose income as a result. As of 30 October 2020, the Council has received 80 applications, with 30 successfully receiving a payment.

1.3 PEOPLE SERVICES

1.3.1 REDEPLOYMENT

In preparation for a resurgence in London, work on redeployment increased to ensure that we have sufficient resources to support our Westminster Connects and contact tracing activity again with some 20 staff needing to be placed immediately.

1.3.2 RECRUITMENT

We streamlined the recruitment process in order to be agile in our approach to recruitment. People Service's would initially look at redeployment and deploying Agency (via Matrix) which were the first options and the quickest routes. If the candidates required were not available via these routes, we agreed with Integrated Business Centre (IBC) to mark these recruitment requests as 'emergency' and the relevant Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) would then immediately flag the recruitment process as urgent to Hampshire. The "emergency recruitment" status would trigger a number of actions to ensure quick progress; for example, candidates are automatically initiated via the risk assessment route, which means they can start straight away whilst the pre-employment checks are run in the background. This agile approach to recruitment proved very successful with good feedback from hiring managers.

1.3.3 AGILE WORKING

We have enabled staff to sustain agile working with the support and equipment that has been supplied. This means that the Council can continue to operate at full capacity whilst offices have restricted space.

1.4 CORPORATE PROPERTY

The Corporate Property team has worked closely with People Services team to ensure appropriate social distancing and a safe working environment in our offices, informed by detailed risk assessments. There was a slow start to staff returning to the offices in July, even for those people that have expressed a desire to come back for wellbeing or practical reasons. Numbers are increasing weekly with active encouragement and reassurance in our internal messaging. There is currently a maximum of 315 workspaces at City Hall and approximately 60 at Lisson Grove for those that cannot, or find it hard to, work at home.

2. OPERATIONAL UPDATES

2.1 REGENERATION PROGRAMMES

2.1.1 CHURCH STREET

In September and October, a series of design review meetings have taken place on Site A, exploring details such as balcony design, brickwork patterns, building heights and the potential to create additional social rented homes. The Development Team aims to submit a hybrid planning application for Sites A, B and C in the spring of 2021.

Significant work has also taken place this month to consider the library proposals for Site A. Site A is the preferred library location for residents and stakeholders, however, there are a number of implications associated with this location and so the Project Team continue to work closely with colleagues in the Library Service to ensure we deliver what the community needs from their library.

The Vacant Possession Team is working towards achieving vacant possession for Site A by December 2021. This date assumes vacant possession is achieved through negotiation. Currently, the team has made considerable progress decanting Site A with 97 out of the initial 167 occupants remaining on Site A. To achieve this, the Council has made good use of the homes available as part of the new local

development, Lyons Place, to rehouse 32 Site A secure renewal tenants. Work is also ongoing on progressing the first shared equity purchases for Site A resident leaseholders who have expressed an interest. The team is also focused on achieving vacant possession for the Lisson Grove Programme, with work progressing on the purchase of 8-12 Lilestone Street acquisitions from Notting Hill Genesis.

In September the pre-planning application engagement strategy was approved for Sites A, B and C. The intention is to hold the engagement sessions at the beginning of 2021. The results of the consultation will be used to support the preparation of the hybrid planning application for Sites A, B and C.

There are lots of upcoming engagement at the beginning of 2021 with Sites A, B, and C consultations and Green Spine also starts on site so we will be engaging with those living close.

2.1.2 EBURY BRIDGE

Works at the Ebury Bridge Estate are progressing well with Phase One demolition nearing completion and the diversion of the extra-high voltage cable by UK Power Network (UKPN) on programme. Recently, we completed delivery on the meanwhile use 'Ebury Edge' at the end of September 2020.

Planning approval is being sought for early 2021 to enable the programme delivery of 224 Phase One homes. Active discussions are underway with our appointed demolition and design and build contractors regarding both early and enabling works packages that will maintain on site works delivery momentum.

2.1.3 TOLLGATE GARDENS AND TOLLGATE HOUSE

The new blocks on Tollgate Gardens are complete, with all new social housing blocks handed over to the Council at the end of September 2020. The Tollgate Gardens scheme has delivered 86 affordable homes, 109 private homes, the communal refurbishment of the retained block (Tollgate House), improved estate landscaping and a new Community Centre. The scheme has delivered a tenure-blind new estate with high quality homes for people from all economic backgrounds. At the new Tollgate Gardens, residents of social, intermediate and private homes will live side-by-side in modern homes. Residents who temporarily moved away to enable the regeneration to take place have already begun to move back to their new homes fulfilling the Council's commitment to a Right of Return. Tollgate Gardens is further evidence that affordable housing in Westminster is of the highest possible standards.

The developer (Clarion) is now focused on completing the refurbishment works to the existing, retained block (Tollgate House), the intention is to complete these works in February 2021.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

In the last quarter the team have worked hard to build on the success of the virtual and multi-channel public consultation process for schemes such as Westmead, Carlton Dene and Balmoral. The feedback and the data has been very encouraging, with more people engaging positively in the process.

Planning consent has been secured for the development sites at Adpar Street, Luxborough Street, 300 Harrow Road and Torrison House. Contractor procurement has already taken place, so the team are now focused on the detailed design and programming phase.

At the end of October, the planners received correspondence from lawyers representing the school adjacent to Torrison House; there is a suggestion that they will seek a judicial review of the decision. The content of the correspondence has been reviewed internally and with the external professional team, and there is still high confidence around the scheme.

The development sales programme continues to create interest and converts this effectively into strong performance in terms of sales. The programme, which is currently delivering 181 new homes for sale, is cross-subsidising the delivery of 165 affordable homes and dementia care beds, new leisure facilities, community space, community initiatives and landscaping across the Borough. At this time the agreed values for properties that have either been reserved, exchanged or completed is circa £78million, which is circa £2.6million above business plan forecasts.

The delivery team have secured Procurement Assurance Board (PAB) approval to award building contracts worth circa £32.5million for eight infill projects which will deliver 93 new homes as part of the 1850 by 2023 commitment. The team has concluded the tender exercise on a further 7 schemes which will deliver 88 units, and expect these to be reviewed by PAB in the coming weeks. This has been a very complex piece of work with extensive market engagement and numerous attempts at packaging the schemes to make them attractive in what is still a buoyant market.

There are currently 21 projects active on site, these units will deliver 694 affordable units. The longer-term impact of the pandemic on construction productivity is still being felt, but we have worked closely with the supply chain to establish robust processes and protocols which should mitigate the impact of future waves. Recently the project at Luton Street was affected by two positive cases, production reduced to 30% of expected for three days, but was quickly mitigated.

The Beachcroft and Masefield development in Shirland Road has now been completed, residents are now living in both the care home (Beachcroft) and the private flats (Masefield). The response to the quality of the buildings has been very positive. Sales remain strong on the Masefield with only 8 flats remaining, to date the development has generated income £1million over the business plan.

After a long enabling works phase, positive construction has now commenced on the Lisson Arches development site, the works are currently on track to achieve completion in June 2022.

Cosway Street demolition has completed, following a short delay after the discovery of asbestos below the ground. The team are working with colleagues in planning to resolve buildability issues with the original design, through a minor material amendment process. Full construction will commence on this site on 12 November 2020, as programmed.

Ashbridge Street is progressing in accordance with the programme, the contractor is undertaking excavations close to the retained British Telecoms (BT) facility, which requires close monitoring and smaller equipment than would normally be employed for the tasks.

The Parsons North development site continues to progress well in accordance with the programme, the site operations have been compromised as a result of needing additional welfare accommodation to maintain a COVID-secure workplace. The team have worked with the main contractor (Osborne) to review the programme and mitigate delays. The project is on target to complete in June 2021.

There are small schemes at Falkirk House, Edinburgh House, Sunderland House and John Aird Court which are being converted to six new flats. Works to these units has been slow to start, the team have held meetings with the directors of United Living to give clear feedback on their performance and agree a recovery programme, the situation will be monitored closely hereafter, the intention is to complete these projects by no later than March 2021.

Despite the recent COVID-related incident and interruption to productivity at Luton Street, the works are progressing well. The concrete frame is currently at first floor level in the private block. In terms of sales, we have exchanged on 29 flats already, and a further 17 are reserved.

Works to the second phase of the Moberly and Jubilee development programme are progressing in accordance with the agreed programme. The developer (EcoWorld) has appointed Bo'Shers as their main contractor and so far they have performed well. The developer has proved to be less adept at communications with the local community and this is requiring additional input from council officers.

At 300 Harrow Road, the temporary buildings for the Nursery have been craned into place, and are now being fitted-out, the project is on target for vacant possession of the main site in January 2021 and the commencement of full construction.

The Council have terminated the contract with the main contractor (Lowe Build) appointed to deliver the projects at Ordnance Mews, Helmsdale House and Melrose House. The termination was a result of concerns regarding the quality of workmanship as well as the contractor's financial stability. Since termination of the contract, the team have been working with a new contractor (H A Marks) to undertake detailed intrusive surveys, as well as undertaking essential remedial works to ensure that the incomplete structures are secure and watertight. The contractor, architect and engineer are currently completing detailed design based on the findings of the surveys.

Farm Street is continuing to progress, however the constrained site conditions and phase of build means that in order to comply with the Build UK Site operating procedures for COVID-19, there are limited personnel on site and productivity is well below what would normally be expected.

The four affordable units at Berwick Street are virtually complete, negotiations around the wider development agreement are continuing between the developer and the Council's Corporate Property team. Once the negotiations are complete the units will be handed-over.

2.3 REVENUE AND BENEFITS

The collection rate for both Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) is down when compared to the same point as last year; for example, at the of September, the Council had collected 57.3% of Council Tax and 49.8% of NNDR. When compared to last year, collection for Council Tax was 62.1% and NNDR was 59.6%. The current national economic issues resulting from the pandemic are obviously the key factor. However, the collection rate is also affected by the fact that the Magistrates' Courts are still locked down in relation to debt recovery, which means that no London local authority can seek Liability Orders to allow their normal recovery processes for 2020/21 debts.

2.4 TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Council is aware that the ultra-low global interest rates for the foreseeable future will have an effect on the Treasury investment yield as money market rates near zero, and interest rates will possibly venture into negative territory in future years (UK Treasury Bills are now offered at negative yield). The Tri-Borough team has appointed a Treasury apprentice officer to enhance focus on business continuity and future cash flow planning to help plan future funding requirements.

The Council has a significant focus on maintaining comfortable liquid balances in accessible accounts to cover unforeseen demands on cash during the pandemic crisis. The team is also focused on exploring future borrowing opportunities to ensure optimum long term solutions on the future funding of capital expenditure.

2.5 PENSIONS

The Pension Fund Investment Strategy has been refined and implemented by the Pension Fund Committee post the 2019 actuarial valuation, and now focuses on cleaner and greener investments. This includes a refined approach to passive index-tracker global equities which tilts investment towards companies with better environmental, social and governance (ESG) outcomes and lower carbon creation. These new equity mandates will have been transitioned from the start of November 2020. A new Climate Financing Strategy will also be developed to be adopted alongside this new investment approach.

2.6 CORPORATE FINANCE AND COMMERCIAL & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

2.6.1 REVENUE

As of September 2020, services are projecting a variance to budget of between £50million to £60million. This is primarily due to income losses resulting from the pandemic, but also includes additional expenditure in various areas of the Council.

To date the Council have received £29.3m in general COVID-19 grant funding and have claimed a further £7.4million from the Government's income reimbursement scheme for local authorities. This means that the current net impact on the Council's finances ranges from £13million to £23million. This will further reduce as the council will receive additional amounts from the income reimbursement scheme.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is currently projecting a variance of £0.8million against budget. This is due to a £4million variance from income losses related to COVID-19 but offset by underspends and additional income on business as usual activities.

It should be noted that there is still uncertainty around the Council's full year forecasts and the current position is based on what is known today and the final position will depend on events over the coming months.

The November lockdown and consequent set-back on costs and commercial income such as Parking and Commercial Waste, combined with further announcements of additional funding from Central Government, serve to demonstrate that this is still very much a moveable position which Finance will continue to monitor closely, providing support to frontline service areas through financial analysis, input into contract negotiations, financial implications review and decision support etc. as necessary.

2.6.2 CAPITAL

The General Fund Capital Programme is projecting a gross expenditure variance to budget of £98.3million as at Period Six. However, it should be noted that a small number of projects contribute to the majority of the variance.

The HRA Capital Programme is projecting a gross expenditure variance to budget of £68.8million as at Period Six. Again, a small number of projects are contributing to the majority of the variance.

2.6.3 OTHER INITIATIVES

The Finance teams are working in collaboration with Strategy and Intelligence and Service Heads to identify and quantify the next round of savings for the Council's 3-year Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021/22 to 2023/24. Work is ongoing to close the estimated gap and will present a full list of savings to Budget and Performance Task group in January 2021 in the lead up to budget approval at Full Council in March 2021.

2.7 PEOPLE SERVICES

2.7.1 STAFF AWARDS, LONG SERVICE AWARDS, AND STAFF CONFERENCE

We are adapting our approach to these events this year and they will all be held virtually through Microsoft Teams. We be hosting a joint Staff Awards and Long Service Awards on Friday 4 December. We have received a record number of nominations for the staff this year, with over 400 nominations from staff recognising the excellent work of their colleagues. There are also 40 people receiving a 20-year service award and 4 receiving the 40-year award.

The Staff Conference will be held over two days on Wednesday 2 and Thursday 3 December. The conference will consist of a number of virtual workshops which will be run multiple times over the course of the two days so that staff are able to join as may as possible.

2.8 CORPORATE PROPERTY

A final round of engagement in the Huguenot House options consultation is running from 9 November 2020 to 8 January 2021. This consultation presents a number of options for the future of Huguenot House, a mixed use building in the heart of the West End, which range from maintenance or refurbishment through to various ways the council could redevelop the building. Utilising a new digital-first approach, the Council's engagement team have posted detailed consultation booklets, launched a bespoke website and will hold a series of online events to enable residents to have their say and help shape the future of Huguenot House.



City of Westminster

Housing, Finance, and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Cabinet Member Report

Committee date:	16 November 2020
Cabinet Member:	Councillor David Harvey
Portfolio:	Housing Services
Report Author and Contact Details:	Amy Just ajust@westminster.gov.uk

COVID-19 Recovery

1. COVID-19 restrictions between 5 November and 2 December 2020

1.1. Housing services have a business continuity plan in place for COVID-19 and the government announcement of a second lockdown has resulted in the initiation of a different level of that plan. Government guidance is not as restrictive as the previous lockdown in March, and services will continue to run wherever possible.

1.2. This means that:

- In-flat repairs service will continue for residents who want their repair done.
- All residents with repairs already booked for November will be contacted to confirm their preference.
- Physical attendance in the office will be restricted to key staff who have to be in the office to deliver the service and those who are unable to work from home.
- Allocations will continue with the exception of our community supportive housing scheme. This is to protect vulnerable residents who are part of those schemes.
- Playgrounds will remain open.
- Major works projects are to be risk assessed but will continue wherever possible.
- In compliance with government guidance, community halls will close.

2. Housing Management: COVID-19 Response

2.1. Housing officers are standing attendees at the thrice weekly 'Tactical Group' for cross-departmental working and core members of the daily Housing Outbreak Management Team (OMT) respond to any potential outbreaks in Housing settings.

2.2. Call volumes are currently very high and are anticipated to remain so while residents understand the impact of the latest lockdown announcement.

- 2.3. A full repairs service is being provided, and operating with training, PPE and distancing arrangements in place. Contractors are working to update their winter plans. Services are constantly reviewed with the objective of maintaining the full repairs service, as long as it is possible to do so in compliance with government requirements and COVID-19 guidance.
- 2.4. The Safe Systems of Work have been reviewed in accordance with government guidelines, and Health & Safety at Work with detailed risk assessments for all contractors in place.
- 2.5. Housing are working closely with Westminster Connects and Adult Social Care to ensure arrangements are in place to work consistently and collaboratively in maintaining contact with vulnerable cohorts. Housing will shortly be writing to their vulnerable residents mirroring the recent message from the Leader to the formerly shielded cohort.
- 2.6. Three testing sites are now operating from Housing Community centres at Greenside Community Centre, Lydford Tenants and Residents Hall, and Grosvenor Hall. The centres have a combined capacity of 4,000 tests per week.
- 2.7. Calls to vulnerable residents are continuing and a number of staff are being seconded to support Westminster Connects.
- 2.8. A new digital surgery pilot has commenced for Soho residents with the support of the Housing Digital team, replacing a physical surgery in the Soho area prior to COVID-19. By using the online booking system, residents can book a telephone or online video meeting with a Housing Service Officer to discuss any issues. The service is being promoted to residents and if successful, it will be rolled out to other areas of the city.
- 2.9. Services continue to be offered by appointment only to residents in our Housing Area Service Centres with measures such as screens, hand sanitiser station and an intercom system on entry in place to make the centres COVID-secure. There is a desk booking system for staff working at the Area Service Centres to support track and trace and is aligned to the system used at City Hall.
- 2.10. Estate cleaning has continued with the frequency of some tasks increased such as touch points in communal areas (handrails, door handles and lift panels). Satisfaction with estate cleaning remains high with both tenants and lessees. All grounds maintenance services are running with a focus on seasonal works such as leaf clearance.

Housing services: operational

3. Housing Contact Centre

- 3.1. In early April, the Housing Contact Centre successfully moved to operating remotely with no impact on service delivery. Absence and attrition levels have both been below the usual rate, with absence tracking at 2% and only one leaver since April.
- 3.2. Call volumes initially dropped at the beginning of lockdown in March and services reduced to emergency response only. As restrictions eased, customer demand increased and, as anticipated, the reduced demand in first two months of the year has been delivered across

June to September. This has meant that the team have had to deal with increased volume with the same level of resources.

3.3. Performance across all contact centre KPIs has been very strong, with targets achieved or exceeded despite the challenges. The only exception was in September, which saw a year on year increase in call volumes of 30%, with call abandoned rates of 10% against a target of 8%. Almost 100% of emails were handled within the target of 48 hours.

2020/21	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20
Calls Offered	12427	11728	17618	19597	17256	22852
Calls Answered	12055	11508	17027	18447	16206	20572
Answered %	97%	98%	97%	94%	94%	90%
Average Wait Time	00:00:25	00:00:11	00:00:26	00:00:39	00:00:27	00:00:42
Average Wait Time - Agilisys	00:00:14	00:00:13	00:00:19	00:00:33	00:00:53	00:01:24
% calls answered in 30 seconds (target 70%)	86%	93%	84%	77%	79%	71%
% calls abandoned	3%	2%	3%	6%	6%	10%
Emails received	3324	3217	4204	4428	3878	4655
Emails completed in SLA	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%
2019/20	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19
Calls Offered	18326	17782	16053	15719	15662	17532
Calls Answered	17436	16849	14893	14797	14420	16734
Answered %	95%	95%	93%	94%	92%	95%
+/-	-5899	-6054	1565	3878	1594	5320

3.4. The charts located at Appendix 1 are produced using Bright software which collects customer feedback via automated post-call surveys. Customer scores are received against a range of categories and residents are contacted directly to address any outstanding issues. The charts show a 12-month trend for customer satisfaction with answer time, first contact resolution (FCR), Knowledge, General Satisfaction and Empathy. A considerable improvement in customer satisfaction with services delivered by the Housing contact centre during COVID is evident. The only area that has seen a reduction in satisfaction is with First Contact Resolution. This was due to the reduced service offer with the repairs service as customer service officers were unable to book all repair types until the service resumed completely on 26 October 2020.

4. Major Works

4.1. In the early stages of the pandemic, all major works contracts were paused, and no work was carried out. Following a very proactive communications exercise to reassure residents, all major work contracts have now resumed.

5. Housing Digital Projects

5.1. There are currently a number of projects and initiatives relating to customer self-service. Existing projects include:

- online housing register applications including the Hope portal (Homelessness)
 - Orchard (the housing management database)
 - digital platform developments including customer self-appointing repairs, online bookings, self-help videos for the website and channel shift
 - customer sign-up to the online housing portal
- 5.2. The Housing Contact Centre are promoting the online housing service portal during their conversations with residents and assisting with sign-ups. There are also planned targeted communications aimed at encouraging those residents who are currently not signed up/registered on the portal.
- 5.3. Two additional service offers have been introduced to the portal; repair requests and creation and updating ASB cases. Phase 2 of the portal is currently being scoped and will include full end to end self-appointed repairs.
- 5.4. Three self-help animation videos are being created, including how to register for the Housing portal, COVID-secure working practices and how to complete simple repairs.
- 5.5. CRM knowledge base is an improvement project for Housing Services through the provision of a knowledge base to empower customer service staff to resolve customer requests first-time. The CRM knowledgebase went live in September 2020 and provides contact centre staff with knowledge articles to improve quality and consistency of information provided to customers.
- 5.6. The Housing Contact Centre Solution replacement project is a transformational project within the Housing Improvement Programme. The project is designed to deliver improvements to Housing Services through stabilisation of the contact centre telephony platform but also City for All and Customer Experience and Digital strategic commitments.
- 5.7. The new software tells customers their position if there is a queue and provides the option to request a call back. It provides more and better analytics and agent management tools to assist supervisors to monitor performance and improve the quality of service from the contact centre. It also includes speech analytics so we will have insight into what is driving contact and can respond better.
- 5.8. The second release will have new customer channels such as Webchat and SMS, this allows more choice for customers to contact us in a way that suits them. The project has inter-dependencies with the CRM for Housing project and is critical to the success of the Housing Improvement Programme which will deliver recommendations made by the Task Force investigation commissioned by WCC, prior to the decision to bring Housing Services back in house.
- 5.9. Phase one of the project is completed with the replacement telephony system delivered on 28 October 2020. This combines powerful IVR solution (the interactive call routing virtual receptionist) with the ability to check staff availability to ensure calls are directed to the right person to reduce delays. It is anticipated that the solution will deliver improved response times across channels with greater insight in forecasted contact volumes, performance, and staff scheduling.
- 5.10. By the end of phase 2 in November there will be a multi-channel offer in place - one integrated solution to manage resident contacts calls, email, and chat. The channels are interlinked and contact information is shared. A customer that has used one channel but

switches to another will have all of their information presented to the adviser who will have a full picture of any earlier activity whether it was on webchat or emails etc. This should minimise the number of service requests that customers generate.

- 5.11. Channels to be delivered by the end of November will include telephone, email, social media, SMS and webchat, as well as improved insight from a powerful speech analytics platform.

6. Repairs, voids, compliance, and gas checks

- 6.1. The full repairs service was reinstated on 26 October 2020 and is performing well. Performance against KPIs for the first half of the year is as follows:

- Tenant satisfaction with repairs: 83% (target 84%)
- Tenant satisfaction with the quality of repairs: 86% (target 85%)
- First time fix: 81% (target 85%)
- Completion on time – emergency repairs: 98.6% against a target of 98%
- Completion on time – urgent repairs: 93% (target 95%)
- Appointments made and kept: 91% (target 95%)

- 6.2. Works to void properties is being completed within target:

- Average time taken to complete repairs to routine voids: 9 days (target 14 days)
- % of routine voids completed within target: 100%
- Average time taken to complete repairs to major voids: 17 days (target 19 days)
- % of major voids completed within target: 97.1% (target 98%)

- 6.3. Statutory testing and inspection of services including gas appliances, water tanks, asbestos and fire risk assessments has continued, with staff taking additional health and safety precautions as appropriate. Compliance across the five areas of gas, electricity, water, asbestos and fire is excellent.

- 6.4. Annual gas servicing was given no dispensation during lockdown despite access to many properties being understandably refused. The team responded well to the considerable challenges and at the end of October, performance was at 99.45% which equates to 32 properties outstanding out of 6,566.

7. Resident Engagement

- 7.1. A fortnightly meeting is held between resident representatives and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services. This has helped to ensure the service remains close to its customers and alert to local issues.

- 7.2. The housing team is working with resident representatives to set up a programme of guest speakers. The meetings have helped to develop the relationship between Neighbourhood Services and Resident Associations and enabled the service to quickly respond to any issues raised.

- 7.3. Other resident meetings continue to be held online. Prior to lock-down, officers worked with residents to create estate action plans, recognising local priorities for

improvement. Work has recommenced on creating new plans and a total of 55 plans were in place at the end of September. The plans are regularly updated on the website.

8. Anti-social Behaviour

- 8.1. As part of plans to improve resident engagement and the approach to the management of anti-social behaviour (ASB), a resident-led ASB case review panel pilot is being established. This pilot will be run in two geographically distant wards: Little Venice and Vincent Square. Engaged residents from one ward will help peer review anonymised ASB cases relating to the other ward. It will give engaged residents the opportunity to sense check the council's approach to ASB management, establish an operating model for the group, and understand how well council methods and approaches align with resident expectations. Some training may be needed for participants but there is also significant material value in hearing the views of residents who are not experts in the usual options available to the council when managing ASB but who are its victims or may otherwise experience it.
- 8.2. There are currently 164 active ASB cases. The number of ASB cases being reported has reduced and the numbers are similar to the same period last year. Cases being reported are predominantly noise nuisance, verbal abuse and harassment. The ASB team keep in regular contact with the victims reporting ASB for every case. The ASB team can currently seek possession of a property due to breach of the tenancy agreement but due to restrictions there is currently a suspension of bailiff enforcement of the orders. There are two cases where possession has been granted but evictions cannot be carried out. The ASB team are making use of injunction powers and two injunctions have been granted recently to prohibit certain nuisance behaviour.
- 8.3. In conjunction with Housing Management, Public Protection and Licensing, the Integrated Gangs Unit, the Police, and the communications team, a plan has been put together for the Autumn Nights period. Each year, measures are taken that are designed to limit any nuisance behaviour. Meetings have been held with families of previous perpetrators and a communications campaign has been carried out.
- 8.4. The ASB team will be running a trial of a new digital noise 'app' which residents, when reporting noise nuisance, can download and record noise that can be used as evidence in taking enforcement action.

9. Rents – Income collection

- 9.1. The income team are monitoring all accounts and are keeping a log of any references to COVID-19 which may impact a resident's ability to pay their rent.
- 9.2. The serving of possessions stay was lifted in September 2020, but the escalation to Tier 2 means that all bailiff activity is now prohibited. No court action or bailiff activity is expected to be undertaken until at least 2021.
- 9.3. The team have moved away from geographical patch-based work and are identifying cases which need the priority work amongst all officers.
- 9.4. Payment reminder actions are being undertaken through telephone calls, text messages, e-mail contact and written correspondence. When debt recovery action is

reinstated in line with the Covid Act 2020, all accounts will be reviewed but the priority will be cases in arrears prior to March 2020 where there are no COVID-19 related concerns. Recovery action will recommence from the initial stage of the arrears recovery process to ensure our tenants have an opportunity to speak to the service first about their account and their circumstances.

- 9.5. Universal Credit claims have increased by 73% from the start of the year and by 56% from 1 March 2020. This is an unprecedented rise from any prior year.
- 9.6. Promotion of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) continues, with communications sent by text and letter to a targeted audience. DHP can only be made as a top-up to housing benefit or universal credit where tenants are in receipt of either benefit. Tenants will continue to be encouraged to claim DHP for a fixed period unless there are exceptional circumstances. There are no time limits on backdating a DHP award. If a tenant needs DHP considered from the point that lockdown started (or earlier) they only need to make this clear on the claim form.
- 9.7. 200 letters were sent in September 2020 to tenants who may be eligible for DHP. 116 texts were sent to tenants who may be eligible for DHP in October 2020 and a further 200 are planned for November 2020. DHP will be continually promoted to all tenants when contact is made, as well as sending targeted communications to cohorts who may benefit.
- 9.8. Work is also underway to identify tenants who may have lost their employment (through changes to UC claims) and who may benefit from employment support. The income team make referrals to Citizens Advice, Cardinal Hume, the Employment Assistance Programme, the energy initiative scheme to support residents and are assisting with UC claims where necessary.

10. Leasehold Services

- 10.1. The 2019/2020 actual service charges were dispatched in September 2020, which is the earliest they have been served. Following a Lessee Scheme process where the council works with residents to help shape and interrogate the charges which will form part of the service charges, this has been a very successful period for the team.
- 10.2. The service charge team are monitoring all service charge accounts and keeping a log of any references to COVID-19 which may impact on our leaseholder's ability to pay their service charge.
- 10.3. The core of the collection process approach is still firmly centred around a supportive gentle payment reminder. Letters do not reference breach of lease or court action. Payment reminder actions are being undertaken through telephone calls, e-mail contact and written correspondence.
- 10.4. To date, no increase of accounts in arrears has been identified, but it is anticipated that this may happen as more people lose employment or claim Universal Credit.
- 10.5. In September the Lessee team hosted their first Leasehold Conference for 200 virtual attendees. The conference was a success and was supported by sessions from LEASE and Citizens Advice. Topics on lease extensions, service charge explained, and short term letting

were very popular with residents. A post conference survey has been sent out to attendees to gauge opinion and help ensure the next conference is resident-led and incorporates any changes they may wish to see.

11. Tenant Management Organisations

- 11.1. All Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) are running full repairs, cleaning and gardening services and have started to reopen their offices. Staff are working between office and home and offering face to face services with appropriate systems in place to maintain social distancing.
- 11.2. TMOs are planning their Annual General meetings and receiving support to hold virtual meetings, or to ensure the appropriate risk assessments are in place. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Government has extended the deadline for AGMs to be held to December 2020.
- 11.3. TMOs have been included in the council's Windows 10 and Office 365 deployment with full use of SharePoint. This will enable the TMOs to manage their casefiles more efficiently across different platforms.
- 11.4. Additional officer resources have been committed by the Council to working with our eight TMO partners, to assist with greater transparency around TMO performance management.

12. Registered Providers

- 12.1. Registered providers (RPs) are offering services in a similar way to the Council, with many staff working remotely from home. Public facing offices remain closed or with restricted access. WCC meets regularly with the other housing providers.
- 12.2. Services such as repairs and lettings are returning to business as usual, with new practices to minimise the risk of COVID-19.
- 12.3. RP websites are being regularly updated to inform residents of current arrangements. RPs are operating welfare calls for vulnerable residents and some are also carrying out food deliveries, working with local charities and volunteer groups.
- 12.4. A number of significant new affordable housing schemes recently completed and delivered by our RP partners are currently being let. These include:
 - Octavia Housing's North Wharf Road scheme in Paddington providing 12 social housing units, plus four units for shared ownership.
 - Woodfield Quarter, (Woodfield Road) also delivered by Octavia Housing is providing a mixture of 19 one and two bed shared ownership homes.
 - Lanark Road delivered by Dolphin Living providing 10 social and 39 intermediate rented homes

Homelessness services: operational

13. Homelessness and Housing Needs

13.1. The majority of our contractors' staff across the service continue to work from home with a skeleton service operating from the Family Hub at Bruckner Street (11am to 3pm) which is open for all emergency homelessness cases. Appropriate safety measures including screening and PPE have been provided in order to ensure COVID-safe guidelines are adhered to.

13.2. The Housing Solutions Service (HSS) at The Passage is now open. The service operates from 11am to 3pm, to mirror the family's service, and is staffed by both Passage and RMG workers. Passage staff are on reception with an RMG duty worker also in the reception area, and a Passage duty worker in a separate office in the HSS space. There are clear procedures in place for when clients present as to how this is managed and how assessments are facilitated. This includes where required a virtual assessment via a Teams video link within the service.

13.3. The contact centre is operating as normal and customers are advised to contact the service via telephone or by going online to complete the assessment form. As part of our continuous service development, HSS Advisors at the contact centre will be deployed onto the new platform that has been implemented as part of the digital solution across Housing Services. Benefits include routing customers to agents and allowing them to work from anywhere with internet access. There is additional functionality which provides customer analytics as well as further functionality to support team leaders with quality management through improved reporting and monitoring. There is also an additional feature which will enable post call surveys to be conducted with customers to collect feedback.

13.4. Homelessness prevention activity

13.5. Homeless approaches to the housing solutions service during April to September 2020 were 11% higher than the same period in 2019/20, with homeless applications down 25%. The reduction in applications relative to approaches is due to new application processes being introduced to comply with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), meaning a full assessment is carried out within seven days, usually on the day of approach. This allows caseworkers to advise applicants and issue decisions quickly and means that applicants who do not qualify for temporary accommodation or social housing choose not to proceed with their application. The new process is more efficient and better manages expectations.

13.6. Homelessness preventions are 31% higher compared with the same period in 2019/20. This figure comprises a combination of positive outcomes in the "Prevention" stage and the "Relief" stage of the HRA. A significant contributor to our prevention performance being higher is the Westlets team, which has been restructured and relaunched along with a new website. The team has been able to improve the service to applicants who want help finding a private rented property, and despite lockdown they were still able to achieve a good number of lettings. The council has encouraged Shelter (delivery partner of HSS) to refocus their attention on homelessness prevention, and they have reported an increased number of preventions.

14. Partnership engagement

- 14.1. During lockdown the HSS partnership created a focus group, to review and improve the service offer to those at risk of homelessness in Westminster, including:
- how referral pathways can be improved and increase early intervention activity
 - participating in virtual Family Hub Panel discussions with Portman Children's Centre and the Bessborough Centre to build on existing relationships, alongside Shelter providing expert housing advice.
- 14.2. As part of ongoing engagement with Registered Providers, the Shelter outreach team are working with one of our main providers, Peabody, and have established contact with the Income Team at the Westminster office with to develop view to building and maintaining a strong referral partnership, with a view to reducing rent arrears and preventing evictions.

15. Domestic abuse

- 15.1. Although there has been an overall decrease by 25% in homeless applications between April and September compared to the same period last year, the data recorded currently shows that there has been a significant increase in the number of applications where domestic abuse (DA) is stated as the main reason for loss of settled accommodation.
- 15.2. DA was the main reason for loss of settled accommodation in 11% of homeless applications, compared to the same period last year where it accounted for 4% of homeless applications. Current year-to-date figures show domestic abuse as the third largest cause of homelessness, behind families being no longer willing to accommodate the applicant, and the end of a private rented tenancy.
- 15.3. High risk and complex cases are referred and managed through our Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). Actions volunteered and agreed at the MARAC will always be focused on safeguarding of the victim/survivor. The purpose of the referral is to establish a comprehensive risk management plan for the victim/survivor which may include actions such as implementing sanctuary schemes, placing special schemes on an address or assisting a victim/survivor with a Non-Molestation Order. Service specialist support has been embedded through an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) from Advance. Our IDVA discusses housing options and liaises with involved professionals on behalf of the survivor, provides relevant support on safety planning for survivors and discusses sanctuary schemes, as well as signposting particularly on legal remedies and options.
- 15.4. During the emergency COVID response, priority was given to interim allocations policy to ensure cases of domestic abuse were being managed in an effective way and that survivors could be rehoused throughout lockdown.
- 15.5. HSS continue to work towards obtaining the DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation and have carried out reviews of their policies and procedures, continual staff training and individual case audits.

16. Quality Assurance

- 16.1. Service Improvement Groups are usually held on a quarterly basis in the Lord Mayor's Parlour as part of the Quality Assurance Framework. HSS and the HSS Contract team hosted its first virtual Service Improvement Group in September, the first session since COVID-19 restrictions were in place. The session focused on customer experience of accessing services during lockdown, feedback on TA Providers and feedback on communication how customers can access information.
- 16.2. The Complaints Procedure to deal with Stage 2 and Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaints regarding the HSS has also been reviewed. The HSS Contract team in collaboration with the HSS complaints team will be reporting and capturing data from complaints which have been escalated to Stage 2 and the LGO in order to assist with service improvement.

City for All

17. Cleaner and Greener

- 17.1. The housing service is working towards improving energy efficiency of the stock and carbon reduction. Detailed modelling of the stock has commenced to determine what is needed to take the stock up to a B rating or net zero by 2040. A full report will be submitted in the near future to the Carbon Action Group.
- 17.2. The housing team has been successful in an application for £125k of funding from the GLA for low income E-rated properties and >£300k for cavity wall insulation to the small number of remaining properties that can be cavity insulated.

18. Smart Cities

- 18.1. As part of the 'Smart Cities' ambition, the housing service is embarking on a project to trial smart technologies to improve management of building services and estates and to provide proactive and value adding services to residents. This includes sensors to remove the need for routine checks and to provide early warning alerts, reducing the cost of maintenance and system failures.
- 18.2. The project is in the early discovery stage, exploring the technology available. A range of technology will be selected to be trialled.

19. Vibrant Communities

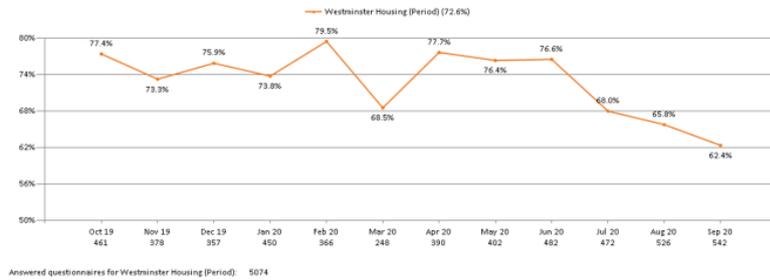
- 19.1. A portfolio of initiatives is being developed to increase the support available to vulnerable residents and create healthy, vibrant and connected communities. A series of pilots will test new ways of working to provide access to co-ordinated council and community services, before considering wider roll-out across the city. Examples of the work include support into employment, support to maximise income, support for residents with mental health issue and support for ex-homeless. With better access to coordinated council and community services, the most vulnerable residents will be supported within their community.

Appendix 1: Bright Navigator Charts

FCR



Period: 01/10/2019 – 30/09/2020



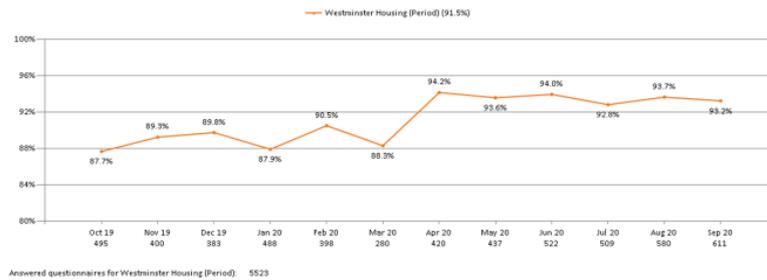
www.brightindex.co.uk

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Empathy



Period: 01/10/2019 – 30/09/2020



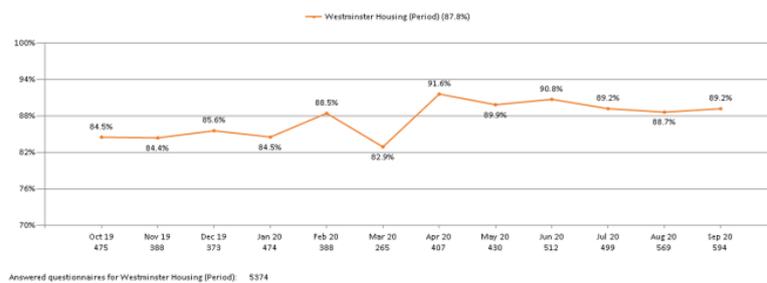
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General satisfaction



Period: 01/10/2019 – 30/09/2020



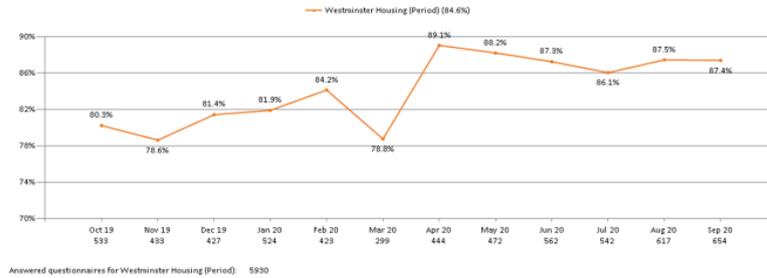
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Answer time



Period: 01/10/2019 – 30/09/2020



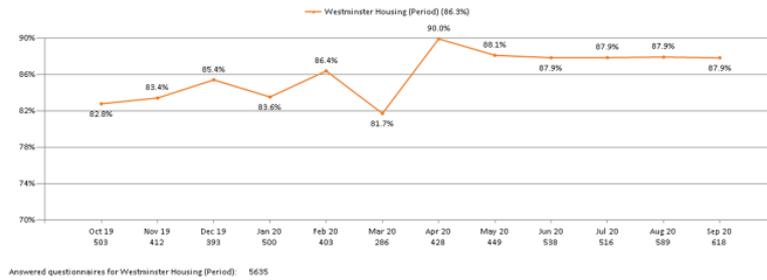
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Knowledge



Period: 01/10/2019 – 30/09/2020



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City of Westminster

Housing Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	16 November 2020
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Diversity and Inclusion at Westminster
Report of:	Lee Witham
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All
Report Author and Contact Details:	Lee Witham lwitham1@westminster.gov.uk

1. Introduction

2.1 This report covers the Council's initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion at Westminster.

2. Diversity and Inclusion at Westminster

2.1 Our ambition is to provide world-class services to the residents and communities. The best way to understand and meet the needs of those residents, visitors and businesses is to ensure the council reflects the diversity of the people who live here.

2.2 The route map for that change is The Westminster Way (TWW). It is the way to change our corporate culture and put in place processes that allow any staff member—whatever their background, ethnicity or gender—to succeed at the council.

2.3 In recent years the lack of diversity in our middle and senior management tiers had become increasingly evident and steps had to be taken to address this.

4. The Westminster Way

4.1 We launched our people strategy, The Westminster Way (TWW) in 2018. It is the map that sets out how we will develop and empower our staff to deliver the best possible outcomes for our communities. TWW has three pillars: “Everyone has talent”, “Everyone is valued” and “Everyone is a leader”. Through TWW we make it clear that inclusion and diversity is in our DNA, and our employment practices reflect that.

4.2 We have encouraged a two-way dialogue with our staff through the development of staff networks. This has led to our staff creating a number of networks, in addition to our long-standing women’s network, including the BAME, ABLE (disability) network, LGBTQ+, Multifaith and Family networks. This happened as we changed the way in which we communicated by being transparent and open to challenge. Staff now have confidence that the organisation is listening and changing. Through the staff networks, a new culture of engagement, challenge and innovation is helping us to bring about change.

4.3 We have taken bold and innovative steps on the diversity and inclusion agenda. We were one of very few organisations in the country to publish our BAME pay gap report in 2018 and we are taking bold steps to become a more inclusive organisation. They include

- Positive Action - For all middle and senior management roles we have committed to have at least one candidate from a BAME background on every shortlist.
- Inclusive mentoring - Championed by our Executive Leadership Team, this enables leaders in the council to improve their cultural intelligence by being mentored by colleagues from different backgrounds.
- Diverse recruitment panels - All interview panels for middle and senior manager roles are gender and BAME diverse.
- Focus on equity in terms of gender and ethnicity in how our staff are rewarded - A new approach to ‘step ups’ to the next salary point within our broad band reward framework resulted in increased number of nominations, improved transparency around step-ups allocation and process and much more equitable gender and diversity distribution across our workforce.
- Only working with recruitment partners who have a track record in this area.

4.4 We are prepared to take risks and learn from our mistakes. These bold programmes are only part of the answer; it is through changing the culture of the organisation and embedding TWW that we will make long lasting, sustainable change.

4.5 Other key highlights that show our commitment to inclusion and diversity include:

- Participation in PRIDE march: Led by the Lord Mayor, the Leader and members we took part in PRIDE London in 2018 and 2019. In 2019 we

had over 80 councillors and members of staff and their families. In 2020 our LGBTQ+ also hosted a virtual PRIDE event for the council.

- Through TWW, we are developing sector leading programmes and working with staff to drive cultural change across our organisation. A key example of this was changing our maternity pay to ‘best in class’ with six months’ full pay and six months’ half pay. At the same time, we made this available to all parents by introducing a new shared parental leave policy.
- Our innovative personal development framework is a step change away from the traditional performance management approach and prioritises coaching and development conversations for all staff.
- Our “everyone has talent” programme provides development opportunities for all staff. Each cohort of employees on the talent programme are representative of the wider workforce with a 3rd of places taken up by BAME staff and 60% by women.
- Holding engagement events focussed on I&D has enabled staff and managers to see the importance of this agenda. Events include:
 - All staff conferences in December 2018 and 2019 focussed on I&D – more than 90% of staff indicated that they would attend similar events in the future.
 - Regular meetings with our top 150 leaders with I&D being a constant theme.
- We are signatories to the Race at Work Charter and have various other memberships highlighting our commitment to having an inclusive working environment.
- We have been invited to speak about our diversity and inclusion journey and our bold approach to the issues at a number of external events. Serena Simon (BAME Network Chair) is also heavily in the Pan London response to the impact Coronavirus has had on our BAME community.
- Supported Employment- The Council has an in-house team, the Westminster Employment Service, based in Growth Planning & Housing which provides 1-2-1 coaching support in community settings for adults and young people with disabilities, health conditions and significant barriers to employment. The Service, alongside People Services and other partners, also provides guidance and support to hiring managers within the Council, as well as developers, suppliers and other businesses with the objective of securing good quality employment for residents.
- Supported Internships – The Council has hosted 2 cohorts of supported internships over the past 18 months. As a local authority, we are committed to continually improving the support and opportunity that we provide all young people as they prepare for adulthood. This is particularly important for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

- The staff ABLE Network was launched approximately 15mths ago. Key highlights include:
 - Working closely with Corporate Property on City Hall and the refurbishment of Lisson Grove. As well as making sure the building is physically accessible, advising on making it much more inclusive for people with a wide range of disabilities and communication needs.
 - Over the last year the Networks work has been just as much about supporting staff to better understand disabilities and neurodiversity as it has about the physical environment. We have seen the development of e-learning modules such as the autism awareness course, developed and delivered by one of the network steering group, and the neurodiversity course which launched in August. Internal Communications are leading on a digital accessibility e-learning module which should help make all our internal and external communications more accessible. Some of the learning from these modules has also been incorporated into our inclusive recruitment training, which is now mandatory for all hiring managers.
 - Over 80 of our staff use assisted technology such as screen readers, the City Council funded a second assisted technology specialist post in our bi-borough IT team.

- We have been shortlisted for a number of awards this year which including:
 - Innovation in Building Diversity and Inclusion category of The MJ Awards 2020
 - Workforce Transformation category of The MJ Awards 2020. This submission was centred around The Westminster Way
 - Best Diversity & Inclusion Approach category of the Business Culture Awards 2020

5. Impact of our actions

5.1 The change in the last two and a half years has been significant. Our staff engagement scores have increased by 12% (as highlighted in our most recent staff survey). This is the second year running that we have seen record levels of staff engagement. Staff are telling us how much more positive the organisation feels. The number of staff saying Westminster is “a great place to work” has increased from 53% to 76% since 2017.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers, please contact Report Author
lwitham1@westminster.gov.uk**

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Housing Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	16 November 2020
Classification:	General Release
Title:	2020/21 Work Programme and Action Tracker
Report of:	Richard Cressy, Head of Cabinet and Committee Services
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration and Cabinet Member for Housing Services
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	All
Report Author and Contact Details:	Lizzie Barrett ebarrett@westminster.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

1. This report asks the committee to agree topics for the 2020/21 work programme and note the committee's action tracker.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Review and approve the draft list of suggested items (appendix 1) and prioritise where required.
- Note the action tracker (appendix 2).

3. Work Programme

- 3.1 The proposed list of topics (appendix 1) takes in to account comments by the committee at its previous meeting.

If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the background papers, please contact Lizzie Barrett.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Master Work Programme 2020/21

Appendix 2 - Action Tracker

WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021
Housing Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

ROUND THREE 16 November 2020		
Agenda Item	Reasons & objective for item	Represented by
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor David Harvey, Cabinet Member for Housing
Diversity and Inclusion	Review the council's approach to promoting diversity and inclusion.	Lee Witham, Director of People Services

ROUND FOUR 3 February 2021		
Agenda Item	Reasons & objective for item	Represented by
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Westminster Builds	Review Westminster Builds business plan.	
Financial inclusion (including roll out of universal credit)	Review Westminster's approach to financial inclusion, particularly in light of the roll out of universal credit and hardships caused by COVID-19.	

ROUND FIVE 10 March 2021		
Agenda Item	Reasons & objective for item	Represented by
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor David Harvey, Cabinet Member for Housing
Major regeneration programmes	To review major regeneration programmes.	
Green Financing	Review the council's green investment strategy.	

**ROUND SIX
29 April 2021**

Agenda Item	Reasons & objective for item	Represented by
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Temporary accommodation strategy	Review temporary accommodation strategy.	
Homelessness strategy	Review homelessness strategy.	

**ADDITIONAL/UNALLOCATED ITEMS
2020/21**

Agenda Item	Reasons & objective for item	Represented by
Oxford Street Programme	To review progress of Oxford Street Programme.	
Housing management services	To receive an update on housing management services following transition an in-house service and how services were managed over lockdown.	
Anti-social Behaviour on council estates	Review new Anti-Social Behavior (ASB) strategy within Westminster's housing service.	
Housing Revenue Account Business Plan	To review HRA business plan	
Impact of Building Safety Bill		

ACTION TRACKER 2020/21
Housing, Finance and Reeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

ROUND ONE 21 MAY 2020		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Cabinet Member Q&A – Cabinet Member for Housing Services	Share figures on repair rates including feedback from residents on the service.	Completed
	Provide an update on work to remove/replace cladding.	Completed

ROUND TWO 17 September 2020		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Cabinet Member Q&A – Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration	Share Morgan Sindell performance figures with the Committee.	Completed
Cabinet Member Q&A – Cabinet Member for Housing Services	Provide the staff turnover rate in housing call centres.	Completed
	Provide figures on gas servicing completed on time across Westminster (broken down by tenants and leaseholders) and gas certificates received from leaseholders.	Completed
	Provide statistics on Domestic Abuse cases in Westminster, especially any effect that lockdown has had.	Completed
	Provide an update on customer services performance in the housing department in the next Cabinet Member report.	In progress
	Circulate ASB on Estates Task Group Report.	Completed
Private Rented Sector Strategy	When appropriate provide an update on 'selective licensing' and what the Council's position on this is.	Completed

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