



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

## **Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **2 March 2023**, Rooms 18.01-18.03, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Gillian Arrindell, Robert Eagleton, David Harvey, Amanda Langford, Patricia McAllister (Chair), Alan Mendoza, and Cara Sanquest.

**Also Present:** Councillor Liza Begum (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Councillor Matt Noble (Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters), Heather Clarke (Divisional Head of Housing Needs), James Green (Director of Development) (virtual), Damian Hemmings (Climate Emergency Programme Director) (virtual), Linda Hunting (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning, and Housing), and Neil Whiteman (Head of Housing).

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.1 The Committee noted that Councillor Elizabeth Hitchcock had sent her apologies for the meeting.
- 1.2 The Committee noted that Councillor Amanda Langford was attending as substitute for Councillor Elizabeth Hitchcock.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 2.1 The Committee noted there were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. MINUTES**

- 3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting held on 7 December 2022.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 3.2 That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2022 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

#### **4. PORTFLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES**

4.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Liza Begum, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, on priorities for the portfolio and any updates that have arisen. The Cabinet Member responded to questions on the following topics:

- The reporting of damp and mould in Council owned properties.
- The inconsistencies with rough sleeping statistics, the Levelling Up report and the increase in rough sleepers reported and additional funding for rough sleepers. Also discussed was the rough sleeping counts and their accuracy across the Wards, including, upcoming street counts and Councillor involvement, the seasonal challenges presented with rough sleepers such as achieving temporary accommodation and what can be done for rough sleepers where they have no recourse to public funding.
- What the Council is doing to reduce outstanding repairs in Council owned properties and the repair target dates for work to be completed.
- How Morgan Sindall is working and communicating with residents.
- The Cross-Cabinet Community Hubs programme opening hours, plans for Bruckner Street and the Mozart Estate, and availability of a drop-in housing service for residents.
- Leaseholder Service Charges.
- Housing Officers, resident engagement, and engagement with Resident Associations.
- The mobile security pilot scheme and future of a similar scheme.
- Anti-Social Behaviour across the estates in Westminster.
- The Air Quality Sensor pilot scheme (across 300 homes in Westminster).
- Changes to the allocations system and the potential effects on residents.

#### **ACTIONS:**

1. That information be provided on the employment point scheme applicable to housing allocation.
2. That the Committee will receive the number of reports the Council has received (via the website and portal) regarding damp / mould.
3. That the most recent rough-sleeping count figures to be shared with the Committee per Ward.
4. That detail of the rough sleeper counts by Ward will be provided to the Committee.
5. That figures are to be provided and an update of progress made regarding outstanding repairs across the Council.
6. That information will to be provided to the Committee (when available) on the plans for the Bruckner Street housing surgery.

7. That information to be sent to the Committee (once available) about the opening of the Bruckner Street office.
8. That the Committee will receive the details and dates of upcoming rough sleeping street counts across the borough.
9. That details will be provided to the Committee (once available) about Leaseholder Service Charges.
10. Information to be provided of RAs and contact details of their specific Housing Officers for Members.
11. The Committee to receive the details of the number and nature of repairs that are currently out of the 28-day completion target.
12. The Committee to be briefed about how the mobile security pilot went, the lessons learned, and the intelligence gathered, after the pilot is completed and before the possible extension is up for further consultation.
13. The Committee to be sent updated comparative figures for Anti-Social Behaviour reporting.

## **5. PORTFOLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE ACTION, REGENERATION AND RENTERS**

- 5.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Matt Noble, Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters, on priorities for the portfolio and any updates that have arisen. The Cabinet Member responded to questions on the following topics:
- Green Doctors, their link to housing services, giving advice to residents, how much the programme via Groundworks costs the Council and how many people are employed in the service. Also discussed were the criteria for Green Doctors advice (over the age of 65 and vulnerable households), how this support and advice could be extended and offered to other residents and in further advice surgeries, and how the service is effectively promoted to residents.
  - Issues around residents being advised by the Green Doctors to install a Smart Meter, which becomes a pre-payment meter, and the energy disruption to residents if they have an inability to manage this effectively.
  - Participation in the MEES (Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard) Pilot that provides matched funding to private landowners, the cost of the scheme if taken forward as part of the Carbon Offset Fund, and ideas for making all residences in Westminster greener in future planning. Also discussed was the incentives to private landlords due to the matched funding, the indirect support this offers private rented sector tenants, and the impact in the private rented housing sector for landowners and tenants in the future if the minimum energy efficiency standards are not met.
  - The criteria for the Council's Carbon Offset Fund for community, voluntary and faith organisations and how the Council can allocate the grant in line with a reduction of carbon emissions.

- More details of the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy and the proposed delivery programme over the next five years, including the total number of affordable homes planned (1855 social homes), approximately 1220 new and 867 new intermediate homes and the future sites for development such as 291 Harrow Road, where the number of available housing options is as yet unknown.
- The Sustainable City Charter and the current number of expressions of interest from businesses and the number (16) that have signed up to the Charter, the involvement of Landsec and the Westminster Property Association (WPA), sharing of information to Charter members, including the plans to involve smaller organisations and landowners, and what the Council can do to improve the number of businesses involved.
- The positive result from the Ebury Bridge ballot (90.9% voted in favour).
- The approval of the grant for the Harrow Road development by the Greater London Authority (GLA).
- The options available for the Pimlico District Heating Unit, the issues presented with the upgrades required to the pipework throughout the system, the consideration of future costs to the Council and residents, and the most environmentally friendly options for redevelopment.

#### **ACTIONS:**

1. Officers to provide the details of the numbers employed by Green Doctors to the Committee.
2. Officers to provide the information to the Committee about the overall cost to the Council for the Green Doctors service and who is responsible for managing this contract.
3. Information to be provided to the Committee about how referrals to the Green Doctors service are being carried out and how the service is being promoted to residents in order to maximise the number of appointments available.
4. Information to be provided to the Committee about Smart Meters, prepayment options and whether this is an automatic transfer when a Smart Meter is installed.
5. Information to be shared with the Committee about the Council's plans to ensure the delivery of the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy over the next 10 years.
6. **THE PROVISION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS:**
  - 6.1 The Chair welcomed Neil Whiteman (Head of Housing) and Heather Clarke (Divisional Head of Housing Needs, Growth, Planning and Housing), to introduce the report on the Council's plans for temporary accommodation for homeless households in Westminster and provide an overview. The Head of Housing and Divisional Head of Housing Needs responded to questions on the following topics:

- The review and update of the Allocations Policy, including, the Council's work with the Housing Commission over the last five months and the recommendations that the Cabinet will make, the importance of the scheme being easily understandable and transparent for residents, and the impact this has on residents.
- The shortages of social housing in Westminster, the need for larger social housing homes, and the demand and challenges of being able to provide suitable two-bedroom properties in the current housing market.
- The high numbers of people that are in Temporary Accommodation (TA) versus the number that move out of TA being very small.
- The future demand of TA and the number of TA the Council plans to achieve.
- The average cost of using commercial, self-catering and hotel, accommodation to house residents on a temporary basis, often with complex needs and the Council's statutory duty to place residents in a suitable environment.
- The catchment area and travel time measures currently being considered for placing residents in TA in Westminster, the mapping project currently being undertaken to ascertain what properties are currently available and those that would be suitable for the Council to purchase in Westminster or nearby, as well as considering out of borough for TA.
- The process and benefits of acquiring ex-council properties for TA, which will in turn benefit the Council with rental income and the average cost of these properties in Westminster, including the assistance of a grant from the GLA the Council receives.
- The gross cost to the Council to offer TA, which is currently £58 million per year, which is weighted against income received, such as housing benefits toward rental payments, therefore the current net cost being £14 million for this year and an estimation over the next 2 years for this to increase to £24 million.
- Landlords increasing rental prices at tenancy changes, therefore increasing the costs incurred to the Council in order to be able to afford rent to residents, putting pressure on the available budget (£15 million) while the amount of GLA funding remains static.
- Residents that remain in TA for longer periods of time and assisting them in making future choices about suitability and locality of other housing options available, including the Placement Policy, communicating with residents so as to have a greater understanding of their individual circumstances, and working with the voluntary and faith sectors to support the work around these challenges and maximise expertise.
- The TA Out of Borough Support Pilot and how the recommendations made in the recent report by the Cardinal Hume Centre, such as a targeted support offer with resources for residents, assistance from the voluntary sector, and Home Start should feed into the delivery of the pilot scheme.
- The number of families (34 to date) that have been referred to the TA Out of Borough Support Pilot and how those referrals are made, including, actions that are being taken to work on a support scheme outside of the current pilot with assistance for maximising income, travel, barriers with language, and other complexities that may exist within the families.

## **ACTIONS:**

1. To provide Members with the maximum spend amount when using commercial hotels and self-catering apartments to house people in need of TA.
2. Officers to provide the prices of ex-council, 2-bedroom properties that have been purchased for TA to date and the target valuations for purchase as set by the Council.
3. Resources to be provided to the Committee regarding how someone is referred to TA and to who, and the resources available for residents in TA.
4. Further information to be provided to the Committee about the employment points given to residents as part of the Housing Allocation Scheme.

## **7. 2022/2023 WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 The Committee reviewed potential items to be prioritised for the 2023/24 Work Programme. It was suggested by Members that an item that considered the use of hostels in Westminster be brought to Committee, alongside discussions about homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 7.3 The Committee agreed the following item to be considered for the remaining round of this municipal year's Work Programme:
  - An update on the PDHU (Pimlico District Heating Undertaking).
- 7.4 The Committee agreed that future potential items for 2023/24 would be considered by the Committee at the next meeting. The Chair requested that Members offer suggestions for the future municipal year Work Programme, prior to the next meeting.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 8.1 The Committee discussed the recent implications and disruption to residents due to gas leak in Queen's Park, including the future recommendations made by officers that attended the emergency as to how the Council could have better managed the situation, and the feedback that will be provided to Cadent Gas.

## **9. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

- 9.1 The meeting ended at 8.14pm.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_