



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 **Wednesday 19th July, 2023**, Rooms 18.01 & 18.03, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Concia Albert (Chair), Gillian Arrindell, Robert Eagleton, David Harvey, Tim Mitchell, Ed Pitt Ford, and Hamza Taouzzale.

Also Present: Councillor Liza Begum (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Councillor Matt Noble (Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth and Planning), Frances Martin (Executive Director for Environment and City Management), Damian Hemmings (Head of Climate Emergency), Heather Clarke (Divisional Head of Housing Needs), Greg Roberts (Head of Supply - Housing), Gillian Matthews (Head of Homelessness Prevention), Linda Hunting (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Nikki Costain (Cabinet Portfolio Advisor for Councillor Matt Noble) and Nicholas Porter-Ch'ng (Cabinet Portfolio Advisor for Councillor Liza Begum).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 The Committee received apologies from Councillor Elizabeth Hitchcock.
- 1.2. The Committee noted that Councillor Tim Mitchell 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 20 June 2023.

RESOLVED:

- 4.2 That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

4 PORTFOLIO 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 experience that residents receive from housing services.
- The different types of training that will be offered to housing officers to enable them to be effective in such a multi-faceted role, including working with officers across other functions such as children's services and public health.
- The Rent Support Fund and how the figures included in the Cabinet Member report have been assessed.
- Housing repairs and existing issues with the service from Morgan Sindall, how this is being monitored and how the performance of contractors is being assessed and actions taken.
- Major works and how the increased costs incurred with delays is being managed as regards to the cost implications to residents, including the Leaseholder Repayment Plan.
- The Corporate Housing Improvement Plan (CHIP) and the assessment of major works including cost effectiveness for residents, monitoring of the services, billing, and consultation with residents.
- Major works and the charges that leaseholders are asked to pay (estimate and final payment on completion) and the payment options and billing process.
- The consultation with Resident Associations when major repair works are being undertaken.
- Technology and the repair service, such as the RAPID App, and giving residents the ability to feed back on the service.
- The performance framework and key indicators for CHIP.
- Leaseholder service charges.

ACTIONS:

1. Further details on the Rent Support Fund and how the figures have been decided, including how unspecified wards has been assessed (Table 1 of the report) to be provided to the Committee.
2. Information to be provided to the Committee about how the Council can support leaseholders further when major works that have been significantly delayed are taking place and costs have been increased.
3. Information to be provided to the Committee about the performance framework used for CHIP and what points are considered.

4. Information to be provided to the Committee about the five key indicators of CHIP that have shown progress over the last 12 months.
5. Councillor Arrindell to send the homeless review case example to officers that had been closed whilst in review status and the relief duty in operation.
6. Information to be provided to the Committee about leaseholder service charges.
7. Information about what types of contextual housing data the Committee will receive from September 2023.

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:
- Engagement with residents and the reliance on residents to assist the Council in reaching its climate action goals.
 - Partnerships between residents, the Council, and Westminster businesses working together.
 - The Citizens Assembly and the suggestions made for lobbying, including the challenges such as financial implications to achieving goals and incentives for businesses and residents and empowering businesses to be more responsible themselves.
 - The PDHU (Pimlico District Heating Undertaking) and the cost implications to leaseholders around major works being carried that affect properties as a result of this, including reassurance for leaseholders of the investment that major works creates, such as making a property more marketable and increasing the value in some circumstances.
 - The Climate Action Team and how this cost is met currently by the Council and the agreed budget allocated to 2025.
 - The cost of managing the Green Bond, how that is facilitated by the Council, and any fees the Council deducts from investors for this activity.
 - The total investment into the Green Bond so far and the projects that are being run with that fund by corporate property and how those projects are managed, including the allocation of Council officers time to ensure a return to the investors.
 - The suggestions made by the Green Doctors to move residents across to smart meters and the issues that have been incurred with lower socio-economic groups when they cannot afford to pay the meter and are cut off from energy, and what financial support is available for these residents.
 - The Enterprise Zone at Lisson Arches and who will be the provider to run the space and recruit occupiers, where it is intended the focus will be on creative and local businesses and enterprise.

- Cosway Street and the pricing of the properties that are being sold by the Council, including that the development cross-subsidies Ashbridge and Ashmill development and due to the cost implications, Cosway Street was unable to be re-purchased by the Council as part of the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy.
- The amount of short let properties in Westminster and these being able to be fed back into available housing options for the Council.
- MEE's (Minimum Energy Efficiency) and the Council's ability to monitor rented properties within the pilot that are not achieving a minimum Energy rating E.

ACTIONS:

1. Officers to provide the budget for Climate Action team, activities, and the head count of staff.
2. The details regarding the management and facilitation of the Green Bond to be provided to the Committee. To include details from the corporate property portfolio about the costs incurred, any fees the Council charges to investors for facilitating the Bond, and how the costs with staffing that are associated with ensuring a return to investors is off-set or charged to external people.
3. Councillor Arrindell to provide officers with resident cases where energy has been suspended to properties due to advice to low-income residents to have pre-paid smart meters installed.
4. Information to be provided to the Committee about how the Council monitors rented properties under the MEE's pilot that do not meet the minimum energy rating E.

6 THE PROCESS FOR ALLOCATING SOCIAL HOUSING

- 6.1 The Chair welcomed Heather Clarke (Divisional Head of Housing Needs) to introduce the report on the Council's activities to and provide an overview of the report. The Divisional Head of Housing Needs responded to questions on the following topics:
 - The assessment of homelessness, eligibility, priority cases, the review process, decision making, including the 56-day time span, the support provided, and the Homeless Reduction Act obligations and options under the legislation, as well as the evidence required.
 - Housing data, how the demand is assessed.
 - The choice-based lettings scheme and how the bidding scheme works and the differences between registered housing providers.
 - Whether the Council is meeting its statutory duties in housing homelessness, including the waiting time for families and temporary accommodation in light of the increases, and what percentage is awarded to homeless households within the allocation process.
 - Void properties and how the void turnaround process is being carried out and how these properties prioritised by the Council for re-letting, including

engagement with incoming potential applicants, and working with the housing repairs team.

- How the void process could be improved through factors such as health and safety, repairs, and gas servicing to increase the turnaround time.
- Residents who have use occupier accounts, such as following a death or another person leaving a property and their status in terms of housing needs and what support is provided by the Council, including any potential transition when the property may be returned for housing re-allocation.
- The need for the allocation scheme to be transparent, visible, and understood by Westminster residents, the importance of a transition scheme, and the need to reflect the diversity in the borough.
- How the priority groups of the allocation scheme work within the bidding process to fill the quota's assigned, how that demand is assessed and waiting times, how people's points may be reassessed, and how applications are reviewed annually as well as residency points.
- How properties that may be under-occupied are assessed by the Council and what initiatives could be implemented to encourage and incentivise residents to down-size, where appropriate, including housing management and tenancy checks, the role of housing managers, and how information held by the Council is updated.

ACTIONS:

1. Information to be provided to the Committee about void properties, to include an analysis of how these are prioritised and how the process works to enable these properties to be re-let through allocations in a timely manner.
2. Information and an analysis about the number of occupier accounts, such as residents in occupation following a death or one of the residents in a property leaving, their status in terms of housing needs, including, what support is provided by the Council for any potential transition should the property be returned for re-allocation, to be provided to the Committee.

7 THE FUTURE OF WESTMINSTER COMMISSION: HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS & COUNCIL RESPONSE

7.1 The Chair welcomed Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth and Planning) to introduce the report on the recommendations of the Future of Westminster Commission and the Council's response provide an overview of the report. The Executive Director Growth and Planning responded to questions on the following topics:

- How the recommendations put forward by the Commission have been challenged by the Cabinet Members and how this is reflected in the report.
- The lack of information about the Commission on the Council's website.
- Where the data supplied in the report by experts has been sourced from.
- Whether the Members of the Commission declared any interests and how this was requested by the Committee.
- Recommendations put forward by the Commission.

- The forward plans and cross-functional delivery for the implementation of CHIP.
- Temporary accommodation the Council owns and the plans for this inside the borough as well as the properties rented by the Council for temporary accommodation close to the borough.
- How the Council intends to deliver the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy.
- The City Plan Review, the Regulation 18 consultation, and full review of the City Plan in 2025.

ACTIONS:

1. Information to be provided to the Committee about whether any Member of the Commission Housing stream received remuneration and if Members were asked about potential declarations of interest.

8 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

- 8.1 The Chair invited the Policy and Scrutiny Advisor to introduce the Committee to the Work Programme and provide an overview and updates.
- 9.2 The following points regarding the Work Programme were noted by the Committee.
 - A potential change to the Work Programme for September to move the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping paper to later date in the municipal year.
 - The request from the Cabinet Member for Housing Services and officers for the update about the housing of Anti-Social Behaviour to come to this Committee in September.
 - A suggestion was made by the Committee to include an update on the satisfaction of resident victims that report anti-social behaviours in relation to housing in the Anti-Social Behaviour paper and how housing interfaces with others such as the police, including, inviting external parties to the meeting.
 - Housing Associations being invited as external guests to come to Committee. The Committee requested for the ability to be able to ask these groups how they manage many of the housing issues discussed such as mould and condensation and repairs. It was recommended by the Committee to consider the groups which had the larger number of Ombudsmen cases.
 - The RAPID App demonstration for the Committee to be scheduled for September / October as a Member briefing session.
 - A visit to a Housing Officer Training session for Members.
 - The Committee do more site visits that feed into substantive items that will be coming to Committee.
 - The dates chosen for Committee meetings and the large gap in meetings between November and March 2024.
 - The role of the Scrutiny Improvement Review and forthcoming changes to Policy and Scrutiny.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 The Chair explained to Members the new Cabinet Member role of Councillor Cara Sanquest and the forthcoming changes to Policy and Scrutiny in the Council that will take effect later in the year.

10 TERMINATION OF MEETING

10.1 The Meeting ended at 8.53 pm.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____