

Housing, Finance and Corporate Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

Committee date: Monday, 11th September 2017

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1. Fire & Gas Safety

Fire safety review

- 1.1 Since I last reported to this Committee, the tragic event of the Grenfell Fire has sadly taken place. As the Committee will know, following this, I have been working hard to ensure that Westminster's tower blocks are 100% fire safe and to reassure our residents. We have also been leading the Government's response to help the Grenfell survivors.
- 1.2 In the hours following the fire, I immediately instigated a fire safety review of all of our housing stock, focusing on tower blocks over 10 storeys high and sent out letters to all tower block residents, Councillors and local MPs keeping them informed of our response. We have 41 high rise tower blocks in total and 23 of these are over 10 storeys. The review is on-going and has included both independent assessments, as well as joint assessments by London Fire Brigade and our internal team
- 1.3 Of our stock, six buildings at Little Venice Tower (LVT) block were identified as having similar cladding to that used on Grenfell Tower and became a key focus for Westminster. Both the Leader and I visited LVT blocks the week following the fire with London Fire Brigade and Jonathan Cowie from City West Homes to personally keep residents informed and reassure them of our commitment to ensuring their safety. DCLG has since confirmed that the cladding system on the six LVT blocks has failed their tests. The estate office for the blocks has remained open so residents can easily raise concerns and we also have a dedicated team at City West Homes who are dealing with all fire safety related matters. Weekly updates continue to be sent to LVT block residents and we have confirmed that the cladding system will be replaced with the highest grade available, which has recently passed DCLG testing. Orders for replacement cladding have been placed and it is estimated that the start date to remove the cladding is the week commencing 4 September 2017. It is hoped that all 6

blocks should have replacement cladding by May 2018. Three of the six notices from London Fire Brigade on the blocks at Little Venice have now been received and works to reinstate door closers and improve fire stopping are on-going. The decking at LVT has been removed in a number of void units, with viewing sessions held for residents in order to feedback on the replacement tile options, which have been well received.

- 1.4 CWH have also commissioned an independent mechanical engineering consultant to undertake a feasibility report for the retrofitting of sprinkler systems in all blocks in excess of thirty metres. The initial report is due to be received on a pilot block the week commencing 4 September, with recommendations for all remaining blocks following in September and October.

Large panel system blocks

- 1.5 Southwark council has recently advised DCLG and other London Boroughs that a structural engineer had been appointed to investigate cracking in a number of its blocks constructed using what is known as a “large panel system” build (LPS). This was particularly important as a Government review of LPS buildings in 1985 concluded that certain types of LPS buildings needed to be strengthened to withstand events such as a gas explosion. Southwark could not find evidence that its buildings had been assessed and potentially strengthened and so took the decision to decant its residents whilst remedial work was undertaken.
- 1.6 Following Southwark’s decision, DCLG asked other building owners of similarly constructed blocks to ensure blocks of this design have been assessed and to take remedial action, where appropriate, to strengthen the structure. Westminster currently has 27 buildings over 6 storeys that have gas provision either for heating and / or cooking.
- 1.7 Following the 1985 Government review, Westminster’s buildings were independently assessed for their structural ability to withstand events such as a gas explosion. The report concluded that “*the LPS buildings are adequate for both normal and abnormal load conditions and comply generally with the requirements of BS8110*”. Nevertheless, in light of Southwark’s decision, the Council has now commissioned a further review of its LPS buildings. This review has initially commented that there is nothing to suggest any different conclusion to that reached previously, but to make sure, a series of inspections will be taking place over coming weeks.

2. Regeneration

Church Street

- 2.1 Following consultation with the local MP and ward councillors, the launch of the Church Street Masterplan will now launch on 7 September and will run for 7 weeks.
- 2.2 Developers Linkcity will be submitting a planning application to the City Council in the coming months for the Luton Street site. It is one of the first major sites to come forward for the area. The proposals include 168 new private, family and affordable new

homes (over 60 will be affordable), a new landscaped green link between Fisherton Street and Salisbury Street, and a new sports and community facility. Linkcity consulted local residents on the latest designs at two consultation events in July, which received positive feedback. The resident-led Luton Street Working Group and the community have been fundamental in helping the developers to shape their plans.

- 2.3 Local residents who live near the former BT repeater station on Ashbridge Street can join a new working group to feedback on design proposals being developed for the site. They have all received a letter in the past weeks offering them this opportunity and will be contacted again ahead of any public consultation on proposals, which is likely to take place in October.
- 2.4 A new planning application is being produced for the Cosway Street site. Residents will have the chance to give comments at local consultation events this autumn. If planning permission is granted it is anticipated that construction would start in 2018.
- 2.5 Following consultation with local residents a planning application has now been submitted by the council's consultants, BDP. It proposes a green link which connects Lisson Street, Broadley Gardens, Salisbury Street and across Church Street. It continues through the new proposed development at Luton Street, eventually connecting with Fisherton Street and Orange Park. The Green Spine project will be an important element in the Church Street Masterplan, providing high quality green space in the local area. Detailed technical design work is now underway and we will be in touch with the community to update on the proposals and programme later this year.
- 2.6 Church Street's 80 arts and antiques dealers, including traders from Alfie's Antique Market, will be hosting their first flea market on Sunday 24 September 2017 between 11am – 5pm. There will be plenty to see and eat, including great street food, live music, pop-up shops and exhibitions. The test event is being supported by funding and logistics management from the regeneration team.
- 2.7 The Create Church Street arts and culture fund is open for new applications until the 16th October. Individuals or groups can apply for between £200 and £10,000 funding to help deliver creative activities for local people of all ages and backgrounds. The fund has already funded theatre, pantomime projects, a Bollywood dance group and much more. Applicants to this round of funding will be able to draw on free support from locally based art organisation The Showroom.
- 2.8 Following a successful weekend of taster sessions at the beginning of July more community activities to encourage health and well-being are planned for the autumn as part of the Neighbourhood Keepers project. The council is working with many fantastic organisations to develop a longer programme for the local community, funded by a £2 million investment from the Church Street programme.

Ebury Bridge

- 2.9 Proposals are being explored in order to work-up renewal options with the community, which are both commercially viable and meet the aspirations of the residents.

2.10 The community engagement process has commenced, with officers actively engaged and listening to residents and retailers. The appointment of a multi-disciplinary design team has been approved and they are due to commence work shortly. Progress continues on rehousing tenants and acquiring properties from leaseholders by agreement.

Housing Zone

2.11 The claim for the first tranche of Housing Zone funding will be made in May. Discussions are currently taking place on the terms for the next, more substantial advance.

Tollgate Gardens

2.12 Progress continues to be good. Works to Tollgate House have commenced and following the Grenfell tragedy we have announced that we are no longer installing external cladding and will seek to strengthen existing improvements to the shared areas within the building.

Infill Programme

2.13 The first sale has been completed, at a price in excess of our valuations, enabling the programme to be extended. Options to accelerate completion of new homes are being progressed and design of the first new build homes is underway.

2.14 I am organising a series of ward walks with councillor colleagues to identify additional infill opportunities.

3. Affordable Housing

3.1 During the first quarter of 2017/2018, a total of 38 new affordable homes have been delivered in Westminster linked to planning permissions granted by the authority:

- **Mollett House** (located in Chadwick Street SW1) – 12 new build s106 affordable homes (7 social and 5 intermediate units) built by Taylor Wimpey and now transferred into the Ownership of Octavia Housing
- **Dixon Butler Mews** (located at the former Police Station site at 325 Harrow Road) – 14 new build s106 affordable homes (8 social and 6 intermediate homes) built by Redrow and now transferred into the ownership of Octavia Housing
- **12-13 Plympton Place** – 4 s106 affordable homes (4 social units) – delivered by Howard De Walden as part of their off- site affordable housing obligations and now transferred to Soho Housing
- **Former Mozart Estate Office** (at Bruckner Street) – 8 new build affordable homes (8 social units). These new build affordable homes have been delivered by Westminster Community Homes.

3.2 Genesis Housing is currently marketing 7 new shared ownership homes. These are due to be handed over later this autumn, together with 5 new social housing units, as part of the regeneration of the Jubilee site in Queens Park.

4 New Housing Options Service (HOS)

4.1 The new HOS contract will commence on the 1st October 2017 and operate for a period of 5 years, with an option to extend for a further 2 years.

4.2 The specification of services was divided and tendered in four lots, as follows:

- **Lot 1:** Frontline Housing Advice, Homelessness Prevention and Support Services;
- **Lot 2:** Single person Homelessness Services;
- **Lot 3:** Housing Assessment, Allocations and Nominations Service;
- **Lot 4:** Procurement and Management of Temporary and Permanent Housing Accommodation to Meet the Borough's Homelessness Needs.

4.3 Places for People submitted a bid to deliver all four lots. Shelter will sub contract to Places for People for the delivery of Lot 1 services and The Passage will sub contract for the delivery of Lot 2 services.

4.4 The new Housing Options Service (HOS) will place greater focus on homelessness prevention (including links to employment services) and digitalisation of the service, in order to better enable the self-service approach.

4.5 Places for People will bring their expertise in managing a property service to increase the supply of affordable housing options and availability of accommodation. Their partners, Shelter and The Passage (a homeless charity based in London Victoria), will deliver the front-line service, along with Residential Management Group (RMG), a subsidiary of Places for People. RMG has delivered Westminster City Council's housing options service for the last 10 years under the previous contract.

4.6 The Council will implement Contract Governance arrangements that will enable the effective review, monitoring and management of service performance and delivery. The arrangements will also enable the appropriate escalation of resolution of service issues and, importantly, the facilitation of strategic reviews of service delivery.

5. Housing Policy

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

5.1 In August 2017 the Mayor formally published his supplementary planning guidance relating to affordable housing and viability, setting out the approach that he will take to deliver affordable housing through the planning system. The SPG includes a new approach to viability based on a 35% "threshold". Developments providing this level of affordable housing or more will have less rigorous requirements in demonstrating

viability. Those providing less will be required to produce viability assessments and will be subject to scrutiny by the Mayor.

- 5.2 The SPG also makes clear the Mayor's ambition to move towards delivery of 50% affordable housing on all schemes in the long-term. This is likely to be reflected in the new London Plan, which is being consulted on in the autumn.
- 5.3 The SPG also gives guidance on intermediate housing and "build to rent".
- 5.4 Officers are going through the detail of the SPG and will look at possible changes to City Plan policies as part of the current revision.

Homelessness Reduction Act

- 5.6 This Bill was given Royal Assent in April 2017 and the government has confirmed it will be enacted from April 2018 and the statutory code of guidance will be consulted on in the autumn.
- 5.7 The Government has announced that they will still go ahead with the policy, but the first payment will be postponed until at least 2018. A consultation on the formula to determine the payment is expected. In May, the Government announced a regional pilot for the housing association right to buy extension until 2021 (the higher value voids levy is intended to fund the housing association right to buy extension).

Higher Value Voids Levy

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6. Community Supported Housing (CSH) Review

- 6.1 A review of our community supportive housing stock is underway and is nearly completed. The review will respond to a number of factors, including the following issues:
 - The future demand for CSH is uncertain;
 - Some stock is of poor quality and needs investment;
 - There are high numbers of studio's and properties which are not wheelchair accessible;
 - Demand from older council tenants in General Needs housing is relatively low.

7. Housing White Paper

- 7.1 The Government published its white paper “Fixing Our Broken Housing Market” in February 2017. The paper asked for comments on 38 detailed questions dealing with proposed changes to national planning policies, strategic planning and the handling of planning applications. We responded by the May deadline.
- 7.2 The Paper also invited local authorities “which have a genuine ambition to build” to enter into bespoke housing deals with government, whereby flexibilities may be granted in return for a sensible and deliverable plan for genuinely additional housing.

8. Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

- 8.1 My last P&S report updated on a piece of work we are undertaking to raise awareness and find new routes off the street for rough sleepers with brain injuries. In July 2017, £9k was secured from the GLA Innovation Fund to progress this work, with the following objectives:
- Raise awareness of the issue within the sector
 - Increase skills to support clients affected by brain injury
 - Create long term partnerships to deliver positive change in this area
- 8.2 There has been increasing interest in brain injury within the homelessness sector and an understanding that the issue may have a role in the both causing and prolonging homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system. The overlap between brain injury as a physical health condition, the impact on individuals, families, housing, and employment makes the subject of crucial importance to homeless health services and beyond.
- 8.3 We have delivered an increase in bed spaces dedicated to female rough sleepers in line with our strategic commitment to focus on this vulnerable client group and in the next quarter, the Rough Sleeping team will open a domestic violence safe space that will see a further focus on female rough sleepers.
- 8.4 Overall, we have seen an increase in engaging with mental health and substance misuse service as well as an improved take up of offers from our partner Veterans Aid. There has been a drop in acute physical health concerns and we are very proud that 98% of individuals are registered with a GP.
- 8.5 The implementation of a Westminster Council policy for the management and reporting of weapons across the pathway has now been completed. This policy has been written in conjunction with hostels, the commissioning team and the Metropolitan Police, in an attempt to deal with the worrying trend of weapons usage across London but also within the rough sleeping pathway. The policy went out to consultation with clients and across the board was almost unanimously accepted as an improvement on keeping residents and others safe. Although figures are yet to be fully collated for this,

the Metropolitan Police have received an increase in the amount of intelligence needed to tackle this issue.

9. CityWest Homes (CWH)

Performance

- 9.1 CWH performed well against its Management Agreement targets for quarter 1 and is on track to meet the end of year targets.

Service Transformation

- 9.2 The new service delivery operating model, supported by a digital programme went live in June 2017, following the end of the housing management contract with Pinnacle PSG. The new model includes a multichannel contact centre, four area management hubs and a new website.
- 9.3 The multichannel contact centre can be contacted through a single Freephone number and e-mail address. Staff have been trained to deal with all front line enquiries and to triage them to specialist teams where needed.
- 9.4 Specialist teams are now in place at the area hubs to manage more complex queries and issues. Suggestions from customer consultation sessions have been built into local service arrangements, in order to ensure vulnerable residents are able to access services and will receive greater support than was possible through the previous service model.
- 9.5 The new website has refreshed content, opportunities for customer interaction and some simple online services. More functionality is due to be added in the autumn, including secure access to services. Numbers of customers contacting the website have nearly doubled against the same four week period last year – from 9900 to 18200 hits.

Repairs and Major Works Procurement

- 9.6 The letting of new repairs and major works contracts is on track for phased implementation between April-December 2017. The evaluation stage of the procurement processes for both north and south contracts has concluded.
- 9.7 Consultation on staffing changes to support the new contracts is now in progress. The changes are designed to improve the quality and accountability for stock investment decisions and to strengthen contract management arrangements.

Our residents were made aware of these changes earlier this month via information in our new customer services leaflet as well as emails to resident reps and information displayed on our website. Our new contractors also wear partnership branded clothing so residents can be confident they are who they say are.

10. SHSOP

- 10.1 Following planning approval for the new Beachcroft care home, the City Council has appointed a contractor to complete the design of the scheme and carry out the demolition and construction work. The contractor, Durkan Ltd, has extensive experience of successful housing and care home developments.
- 10.2 The City Council will hold a 'Meet the Contractor' event where residents will be able to find out more about the works and ask any questions they may have. The initial demolition of the existing buildings will start before the end of the year.
- 10.3 A design team has prepared design options for both Carlton Dene and Westmead in line with the SHSOP projected care requirements.
- 10.4 Following agreement on the preferred scheme option a procurement and delivery strategy will be developed and an outline business case recommending approval of the preferred development option.
- 10.5 I will have meetings with Ward Councillors once the design options have been scoped and shortlisted.