



Audit & Performance Committee

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| Committee date: | 19 September 2019 |
| Title: | Westminster Housing Service Update |
| Report of: | Neil Wightman, Director of Housing |
| Portfolio: | Cabinet Member for Housing Services |
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1. General Update

- 1.1 It's five months since responsibility for housing service delivery transferred to Westminster Council. A full suite of performance information is provided at Appendix A, giving an overview of current service standards and the progress that has been made in delivering improvements. All figures are as at the end of July 2019 (P4). This report draws attention to key areas of performance and provides a narrative to the data in Appendix A. Targets were set by the council's client team prior to the housing service returning in-house. All targets require an improvement on previous performance levels and were benchmarked against published performance for high performing London boroughs.
- 1.2 Highlights within the portfolio include improvements in both the contact centre and repairs service performance. Our Call Centre has performed well, with 80% of calls answered within 30 seconds, against the corporate of 70%. Our Westminster on Wheels initiative, providing a mobile surgery service has also been a success, demonstrating the Council's commitment to providing residents with local, face to face services. Nearly 900 residents have visited the bus and 95% were very happy or happy with the bus being on the estate.
- 1.3 The new Housing Director took up post at the end of May and has set out the five key priorities for housing services, to:
 - a. Improve the responsiveness and quality of the repairs service and major works
 - b. Provide a better service for leaseholders, particularly in relation to major works
 - c. Support vulnerable residents
 - d. Develop a local offer and increase resident involvement, and
 - e. Prevent Homelessness.

1.4 The Director of Housing is overseeing delivery of the service improvement projects. The lessee offer, local offer and repairs offer have been prioritised within the programme and a number of initiatives are in progress that will be in place in October 2019. The October edition of the residents' newsletter will be dedicated to service improvement initiatives and the launch of the 'new look' service offer, including.

- Launch of Westminster on Wheels phase 2
- Increased visibility of staff on our estates
- Launch of a programme to develop estate action plans
- An on-line resident engagement community, including a lessee forum
- Actual service charge accounts for 18/19 issued in a simplified format and tested by the lessee forum before issue
- A new guide to service charges issued with invoices
- Area based lessee open days after issuing invoices/accounts

2 Customer services - Contact Centre

2.1 Since integration the contact centre performance has been positive, with call handling performance remaining within target. Year to date performance to the end of July 19:

- 67,854 total calls received
- 80% of calls were answered within 30 seconds (target of 70%)
- 69% of calls were resolved on first contact (target of 60%)
- 82% of residents were satisfied with call handling - measured through a post-call survey immediately after call handling (target 80%)
- 306 Tweet requests received, and 100% responded to within four hours of receipt.
- 89% of complaints and 91% of members' enquiries were responded to within target

2.2 Performance in July was adversely affected by a telephony outage resulting in a reduced service to residents across 6 days. July call volumes were therefore lower as customers were unable to access the service by phone. We are working with colleagues in IT to explore alternative options to our current solution due to the risks the current platform presents.

2.3 Resident Satisfaction reduced as a result of this outage from tracking above 80% year to date to 78% in July. Satisfaction for August month to date has recovered and is tracking at 83%. A total of 481 Customer Satisfaction surveys were completed, 65.9% of residents believed their query to be resolved and both engagement and empathy levels were tracking above 80%.

2.4 277 complaints have been received this year, of which 49 were received in July. Only 5.8% or 16 complaints have escalated from stage 1 to stage 2. A new manager has been appointed for this service who will drive improvements across the services from complaints learning. The volume of members' enquiries remains high, with 110 received in July.

2.5 The speech analytics project has started and is analysing 30,000 of calls which will help us understand the drivers of customer contact, reasons for service

failure and tracking our residents' emotions as they interact with our service. It is anticipated that the results of this work will be available by the end of October.

- 2.6 In September we will complete a quality audit of our service quality framework, with industry experts analysing the quality of our interactions with our customers, providing best practice training on coaching and quality monitoring and strengthen our approach to service quality for the next twelve months.

3 Repairs, Voids and Health & Safety

- 3.1 The repairs service is making progress, with incremental improvements across the KPIs:

- 86% of repairs were completed on the first visit, a 4% improvement on 18/19
- Satisfaction with the repairs service is at 84%, a 2% improvement on 18/19
- Statutory services relating to electrical testing, gas safety checks and water tank monitoring all continue to perform very well, with compliance levels all at 100%.

- 3.2 Improving the repairs service is a key priority for the Director of Housing, with particular focus on keeping appointments, quality of work and timeliness of the repair. Work across the housing team and with contractors is underway to make the necessary improvements over the course of the year.

- 3.3 The time taken to repair and relet void properties has reduced from 57 days for the year 18/19 to 44 days for 19/20 and 38 days for July. A void services improvement team has been established to work as a collaborative group to drive improvement across the service.

- 3.4 New tenant satisfaction with the letting process dipped in April so we introduced a courtesy call to all new tenants within a week of tenancy commencement. This has allowed us to remedy any issues early in the tenancy and reinforces our commitment to listen to customers.

- 3.5 Greater focus has been given to compliance performance this year, and performance has been good for the year to date, particularly gas servicing which has been maintained at 100% for the financial year.

- 3.6 Asbestos management has been reviewed and a plan is in place to resurvey sites and bring all data up to date by summer 2020. New asbestos removal contractors are currently being procured and the contract is expected to be in place by December 2019.

- 3.7 Performance on completion of actions identified through fire risk assessments is ahead of target in all categories with no high risk actions overdue.

4 Major works

- 4.1 Housing is undertaking a significant programme of major works, with 15 projects on site or due on site in 2019/20. There have been challenges and we recognise that improvements need to be made in a number of areas.

- 4.2 Two major works schemes have completed this financial year and residents have been surveyed with 79 responses received. Lessee satisfaction for these schemes is significantly higher than the 18/19 out turn, indicating that changes made to the consultation process are taking effect. Further changes are being made which will impact on the new schemes about to start on site.

5 Neighbourhoods

- 5.1 Satisfaction with antisocial behaviour case handling dipped at the beginning of the financial year following a number of staff resignations. Four new case managers have joined the team and performance for July was above target.
- 5.2 Noise nuisance continues to be the main reported issue of anti-social behaviour. Cases are often related to everyday living noise, which tends to escalate in school holidays. To help reduce the impact of everyday noise, the team has been working closely with an early help practitioner who specialises in supporting families with young children who may be involved in low level nuisance. The early help practitioner recently attended a Westminster on Wheels event with the ASB team; to speak to parents and listen to resident' concerns.
- 5.3 Housing Services have been working with other departments to address serious nuisance and crime on the Lillington and Longmoore estate and the Hallfield estate, where there has been an increase in individuals bedding down on estate grounds. We are working with the rough sleeping outreach teams to provide support to those sleeping rough.
- 5.4 The housing services teams have carried out 67 flexible tenancy reviews. The purpose of these reviews is to assess whether tenants approaching the end of five-year flexible tenancies are to be offered a new tenancy in their current home. To date, one under-occupying household will not have their current tenancy renewed but will be offered a five year tenancy in a smaller property and three other tenants have been offered two-year tenancies rather than five-year tenancies to enable them to rectify a breach of their tenancy agreement. The remainder are being offered another five year tenancy in their current home.
- 5.5 127 tenancy reviews have been completed with vulnerable residents to see if they require additional support or have any unresolved repair or tenancy issues. Residents were selected from a list of those who have not made contact with the service for three months, and those listed as requiring support in the event of an emergency. From these visits, 121 have resulted in a follow up action such as a repair, a referral to social services or support with applying for a move.
- 5.6 5 properties have been recovered on tenancy fraud grounds. Three of these were for unauthorised subletting and one was for a fraudulent succession claim. There is a pipeline of properties currently with court dates for possession or awaiting eviction or surrender, with around 40 cases live with the CAFS (Corporate Anti-Fraud Service). An action plan is currently being prepared, with a range of actions including publicity campaigns, advertising the council's anonymous fraud reporting hotline, tenancy check blitzes and a potential key amnesty. An article has been prepared for the October edition of the residents newsletter to encourage reporting. The target of 25 properties to recover this

year remains challenging but the proposed action plan and joint working with the CAFS will provide the best opportunity to achieve this.

6 Income Collection

Rent collection

- 6.1 At the end of July 2019, current tenancy rent arrears stood at £1,044,033 which represents just 1.29% of the debt. Rent collection at the end of July 2019 was 98.72% against a target of 98.50%. As a comparison to other comparable London Boroughs, rent collection is consistently within the top three for rent collection.
- 6.2 There have been just three evictions in 2019/20 due to rent arrears. The income management team works in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to ensure tenants have access to money management advice, debt counselling and help with claiming benefits. We now have 909 Universal Credit cases, an increase from 883 cases at the end of June 2019.

Lessee service charge collection

- 6.3 Our Billing process, particularly around timing, accuracy and frequency of bills needs improving and a plan is in place to address the required changes. The next opportunity to make a difference is with redesigned actual service charge invoices which will be despatched at the end of September 2019. The invoices will be in simpler format and will be accompanied by a new guide to the charges. The estimated service charge demands for the period April 2020 to March 2021 will be a single annual estimated demand rather than two half yearly demands. The proposed changes and the new format will be tested by a focus group of leaseholders prior to implementation in March 2020.
- 6.4 Currently, Westminster Council issues half yearly estimated service charges. We will serve the second estimated demand in October of this year, but this will be the last time that we serve two estimated service charge demands for the same financial year.
- 6.5 Lessee service charge collection is on track to meet the strong target of 98.0%. The current performance is at 97.5%, just half a percent off target. The collection of the service charge arrears can be a lengthy process and the arrears escalation process requires a number of reminder letters before the recovery pre-action protocol process can commence. The leasehold operation team ensure that the recovery process is avoided where possible in the arrears process by attempting to engage with our leaseholders by written communication and by telephone.
- 6.6 The major works aged debt well on track to exceed the annual target of £1.16m. The aged debt sums are lower than many comparable London Boroughs and are good reflection of the arrears recovery work undertaken by the team. The favourable payment terms offered Westminster City Council which are above and beyond the terms of the lease play a strong part in supporting our residents with the ability to pay their major works service charge invoices.

7 Estate Services

- 7.1 In June cleaning standards across the borough were recorded at 97.1% and grounds maintenance was 96.2% based on 834 inspections undertaken.
- 7.2 Working in partnership with the housing teams and Continental Landscapes, we have officially retained the Green Flag Award for Churchill Gardens, Lillington & Longmore and Lisson Green. These Green Flags signify that Westminster's Housing Teams and partners continue to provide some of the best green spaces in the heart of London.
- 7.3 As of August 1st, our in-house gardening team have now transferred under 'TUPE' to Continental Landscapes and we are looking forward to continuing to provide a very high standard of ground maintenance.

8 Estate Priorities

- 8.1 As part of our review of the service we will be engaging with residents about their priorities and formulating action plans for all our estates. This will form the agreement, and accountability, between Westminster and the residents.
- 8.2 The Westminster on Wheels programme is continuing to run alongside this and continues to be well received by the local communities it is visiting. So far nearly 900 residents have visited the bus and we have found that:
 - 95% were very happy or happy with the bus being on the estate
 - 95% found the bus accessible
 - Nearly 3/4 of issues resolved on the bus. Other queries contributed to ongoing repair, housing and ASB matters.
 - 79% believed Westminster Housing services will improve
 - 85% found the service met their expectations
 - 25 referrals for employment