

## Housing, Finance, and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### Cabinet Member Update

**Committee date:** 17 March 2020

**Report Of:** Councillor David Harvey

**Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Housing Services

**Report Author and Contact Details:** Amy Just  
[ajust@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:ajust@westminster.gov.uk)

### 1. Customer Experience and Digital

The third quarter and start of the winter period delivered approximately 75,000 customer enquiries into the contact centre. This included over 61,000 calls and 12,000 emails. Despite an increase in volumes of over 26% on the previous quarter, the contact centre delivered its best performance for this time of year with 92% of calls answered and 68% within 30 seconds. Year to date average wait time is 1 minute and 3 seconds.

Performance year to date continues to be within target. From April to January 75% of calls were answered within 30 seconds and 93% of all calls were answered. In January 20,017 calls were received with 73% answered within the 30 second target.

A total of 4,693 Customer Satisfaction Surveys have been completed year to date and overall 83.7% of residents are satisfied with the services delivered by the Contact Centre. 72.3% of residents believed their query to be resolved and both engagement and empathy levels remain above 85%.

A total of 168 stage 1 complaints were received with 20 of those escalating to stage 2.

<b>Q3 – 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2019 to 31 Dec 2019 Complaints by Service Area</b>		
<b>Service</b>	<b>Stage 1 Complaints</b>	<b>Stage 2 Complaints</b>
Repairs	130	13
Contact Centre	1	1
Housing Services	12	2
Lessee Services	11	2
Other	0	2
Major Works	3	
Estate Management	3	
Income Management	4	
ASB	4	

<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>20</b>
--------------	------------	-----------

The largest volume of complaints can be attributed to the repairs service, this historically has been the case due to the volumes of transactions that this is service completes.

For the repair related complaints customer care, delays and leaks remain the common themes. Work is in progress to redesign the Heating and Leaks processes working alongside our term contractors. The new Heating and Leaks team will go live in the contact centre from 1<sup>st</sup> April which will deliver enhanced levels of diagnosis and improved communication to customers.

We are also working with some residents to review these processes from a user experience perspective.

<b>Q3 – 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2019 Top 3 Issues</b>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>	<b>Partially Upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>
Customer Care	39	4	12	14
Delays	34	3	5	22
Water leaks	17	1	4	10

As a result of the insight provided in the speech analytics report, additional training has been scheduled for the contact centre teams until the end of March 2020. It will align with each of the five service priorities with the training delivered in November (345 training hours). The focus will be on leasehold refresher training, listening and soft skills and domestic violence.

Training in January focused on the repairs improvement plan with both classroom-based training and coaching delivered to embed the changes to the repairs processes and new ways of working. Further training on leasehold services and service charge billing is planned in February before the changes to the billing process come into effect.

Scoping of the Housing Customer Relationship Management solution has commenced.

A discovery period to identify prioritised phases for delivery has recently been completed. A blueprint has been designed with the following phases identified with priorities based upon delivering early value to customers. An Agile approach to project delivery will be used so that deliverables will be refined and re-prioritised at each stage to ensure improvements that bring the most customer value are prioritised.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Capability</b>
Phase 1 – Knowledge Base	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Immediate access to local knowledge e.g. block info &amp; patch lists to improve first contact resolution</li> <li>2. Diagnostic steps to gain the right information first time to improve resolution time and quality.</li> </ol>
Phase 2 – Customer Requests	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Single view of conversation history &amp; notes to empower the CSA to provide updates and resolution.</li> <li>2. Case management functionality to improve the way cases are managed.</li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Clear, system-based processes with built-in roles and responsibilities and internal SLAs to improve accountability and customer service</li> <li>4. Triggers for follow-ups to deliver pro-active case resolution</li> <li>5. Link knowledge base functionality into the case logging/management process so it shows contextual information.</li> <li>6. Basic integration with Orchard to bring in customer, property &amp; lease data.</li> </ul>
Phase 3 – Repairs Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Single, user-friendly application to sit on top of Orchard.</li> <li>2. Integration to raise repairs in a user-friendly interface.</li> <li>3. Improved integration with the repairs contractors' system to allow for better data sharing between the call centre and repairs contractor to support a single-view of the customer.</li> </ul>
Phase 4 – Customer Self-Serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improved self-serve capability</li> <li>2. Customers to be able to track and update requests</li> </ul>

Work is also underway to map out our customer journeys and the processes that we follow to fulfil customer requests. We will prioritise improvements to journeys that will deliver the most value to our customers, for example, reporting repairs, managing leaks, anti-social behaviour handling, lessee billing, moving home, complaints handling and supporting vulnerable customers. Touchpoints with other departments will be identified to design a more seamless service to customers. Processes will be designed to ensure requests can be resolved first time, wherever possible, with proactive measures built in to minimise repeat contacts.

The knowledge base (phase 1) has been designed and work will commence soon to develop it ready for staff to test within the contact centre.

## 2. Repairs

The repairs service has performed well over the winter period, with the seasonal increase in responsive repair requests having no impact on year to date performance.

Satisfaction with both the quality of repairs and the service overall have increased to 84% for January (year to date 83%) and 90% of repairs were completed on the first visit (year to date 86%).

99.4% of all emergency repairs were completed on time during January (year to date 99.3%).

Live repair tracking has been launched through our Morgan Sindall Partners with “Live” track my repairs rolled out in February 2020. This will be monitored and targeted to reduce missed appointments.

In addition to the above, the live “Repair feedback” is monitored with instant resident satisfaction or dissatisfaction being received straight after a repair is completed. The repairs team will use this to target and post inspect jobs completed on the day from the end of March 2020 with new Building Inspectors joining the team.

The main drivers of dissatisfaction stem from quality and time taken to complete repairs, incomplete repairs, and communications from repairs teams.

Service improvements to address dissatisfaction are currently being targeted as follows:

- Review and accuracy/quality of orders raised via feedback from our service provider on “first time fixes” through March 2020
- Daily review of live jobs against operative availability
- Daily scheduler review with the contact centre to ensure bookings at first point of contact
- Review of Leak team and process/case management
- Scheduling availability and increased number of operatives in Westminster

A significant proportion of all repair calls are plumbing or leak related, particularly in the south of Westminster. The management of leaks has improved in the last year through establishing a dedicated team and introducing a planned preventative maintenance programme which is being reviewed and published in February. Work has now started to handle plumbing related calls at the point of first response between the contact centre, repairs team and service providers to case manage and track all repairs associated with leaks.

Our statutory compliance figures for gas, electricity and water testing remains strong. For January the KPIs were:

- Gas in-flat compliance – 100%
- Gas communal boiler compliance – 100%
- Water tank testing – 100%
- Electrical testing communal – 100%

### **3. Voids**

The Void Service Improvement Project to improve void management and reduce the time taken to repairs and re-let properties is taking effect. The average time taken to repair and re-let properties in December was 22 calendar days. January performance was impacted by reletting being put on hold over the Christmas period (47 days). New tenant satisfaction is at 86% for the year to date.

### **4. Fire Safety**

The programme of fire door upgrades and replacement is ongoing. Work is now complete at Glastonbury House. Work at Warwick & Brindley commenced in February, with samples presented at resident meetings and pilot installations. Works have commenced at Fountain Court with further replacement due to commence at Semley House and Hyde Tower. Hall & Braithwaite and Brunel have been delayed pending stakeholder authority to progress. The full fire door upgrade and replacement programme is expected to be completed by 2022.

As leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that their own fire doors are to standard, we have been writing to leaseholders individually to seek confirmation that doors meet current performance requirements. Leaseholders can opt-in, via written agreement, to have their fire doors replaced by the same manufacturer in buildings where tenant doors are being replaced as part of planned major works. The first pilot for leaseholder opt-in for fire doors is Warwick and Brindley. The leaseholder offer is subject to receiving final costs from service providers.

#### Warwick and Brindley estate towers

The external wall insulation project is on site and due to complete in July 2020.

#### Glastonbury House and Glarus Court

Works at Glastonbury House, including important fire safety work which includes the retrofit of sprinklers to flats, new fire doors, fire stopping, and the provision of mobility scooter storage facilities were signed off as complete in December 2019.

Glarus Court (low rise, extra care scheme) was also identified as a pilot for sprinkler installation last year. This is currently being reviewed to ensure the best solution for the building and residents.

#### Torridon House

A new non-combustible façade has been designed for the block. Design work in respect of the proposed new façade is complex, but the design is well advanced. Detailed internal surveys have commenced and will enable conclusion of the design. Our Health & Safety team are comfortable with the mitigation measures undertaken to date.

Works to install individual fire alarm systems (LD2s) within each flat have been completed.

### **5. Estimated service charges 2020/2021**

The new annual service charge invoices will be served in March 2020 for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. The new mailing will include a 'Your Service Charge Explained' leaflet to explain the basis of the day to day service charge and the associated methodology for the calculation of the heads of charge. Where residents have received a statutory S20 notice prior to January 2020 they will also receive a major works service charge invoice and an accompanying 'major works billing' booklet to help to explain the basis of the major works charge.

Revised templates and letters have been circulated in draft form for comments from residents and colleagues. The newly formed Westminster Connected lessee group (online consultation community) have received their second survey to ask for their views and as much feedback as possible will be acted on.

The move to annual billing will provide much more clarity to leaseholders. One sum is to be paid over 12 equal monthly instalments, which will allow leaseholders to budget for the whole financial year ahead and it will allow the actual service charge adjustment (a credit or a debit) to be a standalone document which will make it easier for residents to scrutinise.

A new and improved leasehold guide is in production to provide an enhanced and visually enriched online document. The purpose of the document is to enable residents to 'self-serve' and to obtain as much information as possible at a time and place convenient for them.

The new right to buy offer from January 2020 offers a bespoke service to tenants looking to purchase their property. Tenants will be offered a full interview to discuss the implications of becoming a homeowner and to provide a detailed explanation of the basis of the service charge calculations, as well as any major works planned for the property.

It will also provide an opportunity to discuss the obligations under the terms of the lease for both the residents and the Council.

Topics such as subletting, insurance, short letting, alterations, permissions and help and assistance will be discussed at length to ensure prospective lessees are provided with as much information as possible before they complete the purchase of their property.

Leases will also be granted for a full 125 years from the date of completion, which will end the issue of the co-terminus lease date for our residents. This change will delay the need for lease extensions for where the first lease in the block was sold in the 1980s.

## **6. Rent collection**

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. At the end of January 2020 current tenancy rent arrears stood at just 1.48% of the debit. This performance is achieved through helping tenants to sustain their tenancies and just 6 evictions have been carried out in 2019/2020 due to rent arrears.

At the end of January 2020, 1,184 tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit (UC), an increase from 688 cases at the end of March 2019. The arrears for UC cases at the end of January 2020 totalled £461,892 with 63% of UC cases in arrears.

There have been 6 evictions carried out due to rent arrears this year. To tackle the increasing debt caused by the rollout of UC, an outreach team has been created to work with those in receipt to help them sustain their tenancy, which commenced work in January 2019. An example of the team's success is a resident who was unaware of their eligibility for universal housing credit and had arrears accumulating. The outreach team assisted the resident in claiming housing costs and undertook an income and expenditure assessment to help the resident plan and manage their finances. A review of the function is being undertaken to place the role within the income officers' duties.

A total of £198,871 was collected in former tenant income at the end of January 2020 against an annual target of £177,600. The team have surpassed the annual target.

## **7. Tenancy reviews**

Tenancy reviews continue both to help ensure residents receive the support they need to sustain their tenancies and to identify potential cases of tenancy fraud. As at the end of January, 521 tenancy reviews have been completed, exceeding the annual target of 500 reviews.

Residents were selected for a review based on three criteria:

- Those who had not been in contact with the Housing Service for some time
- Those appearing on our local emergency plans as needing support
- Flexible tenant five year 'renewal' visits and introductory 'settling in' visits which take place during the first year of a new tenancy.

Partners met on 28 February to agree how best to target these visits for the coming year, to support the housing priority - residents requiring support and the planned 'Vibrant Communities' project.

## **8. Estate Services**

The Estate Services team are piloting a new mobile working app which allows them to report issues such as repairs, parking, pest control and ASB immediately to the relevant service area or provider. Access to this will be rolled out to other housing teams once testing has been completed.

The team are also piloting a new way of delivering certain communal repairs. Repairs identified which meet the scope of the pilot are passed to a dedicated team who are managed in-house and can respond more quickly. The objective of this project is to shorten the time taken to complete simple but high-profile repairs, and to give the power to resolve local issues back to a locally managed team.

## 9. Antisocial Behaviour

Satisfaction with case handling increased to 67% in January (year to date 63%). The team have drawn up a three-month improvement plan based on customer feedback and the highest reported categories of ASB to ensure they continue to improve performance. Currently there are 145 open cases, with the top three categories being noise, drug misuse and verbal abuse/harassment/intimidation.

A response to the ASB on Estates Task Group recommendations has been drafted and will be presented to Policy and Scrutiny Committee. Work to deliver the actions is already underway and Housing's ASB team has been working with other departments to streamline the customer journey through a defined list of ASB categories and referral routes. This includes training on how to respond to common customer reports and identifying where the report needs to be sent to ensure the customer receives the right response the first time.

New functionality on the online customer reporting platform is in the final stages of testing. This will make ASB reporting online easier, reduce the time taken to triage cases, provide more advice and allow customers to update live cases.

The team have been working closely with the Noise Service and Communications to look at joint working to respond to noise. This includes a noise workshop for Housing staff and regular meetings to discuss cases. A drop-in event is planned for April for residents.

## 10. Estate priorities

Following the launch of the new Housing Services Offer in October, the following progress has been made on the various strands of re-engagement work:

- **'My Estate Walkabouts'** - so far carried out **nine** My Estate Walkabouts across various estates in the borough. These are continuing according to the published programme for this year.
- **'My Estate Action Plans'** over 30 plans have been agreed with residents, recognising local priorities for improvement - jointly managed between the estate officer, chair or residents' association and Ward Member and updated monthly. The plans are available online to track progress.
- **Resident engagement** - **five** new resident groups (Dufours Place, Warwick Crescent sounding board, Mozart, Queen's Park, Ascot and Windsor Gardens) have been set up
- **Online resident engagement** - **215** residents (both tenants and leaseholders) have signed up to be part of 'Westminster Connected', our online engagement group. Lessees have already been engaged in consultation activities and the consulting with the wider group will begin early in the new year on areas that need to be improved.

- **Housing Surgeries** - have been increased to **14** including Marylebone and Church St libraries, providing residents with access to housing staff close to where they live and already receive other services
- **Westminster on Wheels** - over **1600** residents visited Westminster on Wheels, with **95%** of them saying that they were happy that the service was on their estate
- **Mobile working** – see Estate Services update above.

## **11. Parking**

Consultation on the final Phase of Traffic Management Order coverage and the incorporation of amendments identified during earlier consultation phases has now concluded.

An options paper outlining possible solutions for the Wharncliffe Gardens and Hallfield estates has been considered where there have been some concerns expressed by the respective Residents Associations on the proposals. Direction has been sought from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways.

Enforcement has begun across the city with the majority of areas now covered by various orders. Progress continues to be made on updating permits and completing lining and signage installation.

## **12. Resident engagement and opportunities**

The details of the new resident engagement structure and the associated implementation plan are currently being finalised worked out before the recruitment campaign commences.

In October and November, over 50 residents joined 30 Westminster City Council staff to help with bulb planting on 12 estates. As a result, three existing resident groups requested help to set up community gardening projects. The project helped with the drive to raise staff visibility on our estates and received positive coverage in the press.

Seven new residents' groups have now been set up since April 2019 and work is ongoing to support other residents who have expressed an interest in resident engagement opportunities. Four groups were set up in the October-December quarter on Dufours Place, Queen's Park Court, Ascot and Windsor and Warwick Crescent. Assistance continues to be provided to the groups at Grosvenor & Regency and West Streets & Oaktree. At Grosvenor estate, residents are working on their governance arrangements, including a day to focus on their estate priorities.

A Westenders Residents Network is being re-established in the Soho and Covent Garden area to ensure residents of the smaller, more spread out properties have a way of coming together as there are no facilities (halls) in this area.

A party for almost 100 residents on the Tollgate estate was held in the new hall as a thank you to residents for being patient whilst their estate was being redeveloped. In Queens Park over 30 elderly residents enjoyed festivities and activities to establish a social network and help prevent social isolation.

19 annual reviews were undertaken of residents' associations to ensure they had good governance identified any support they may need. Assistance was provided in recruitment drives and grant applications.

### **Community Development and social value**

Churchill Gardens youth Club has now been refurbished with a full new kitchen being provided by United Living as part of their social value commitment and other works commissioned by the small works team to prepare for a youth offer on Churchill Gardens. The launch of the renovated youth club will take place in March, with all young people on Churchill Gardens invited to give their views on what activities they would like to see at the club and sports pitches.

Other social value examples include United Living redecorating the Warwick lounge at Glastonbury House for elderly residents, donating a Christmas Tree, lights and decorations. They also decorated and put up new shelving at the Pimlico Toy Library.

Portgate Hall, an underused hall on the Lydford estate, is being converted into a Construction Training Centre as part of Morgan Sindall contribution to social value. The hall will be used to provide pre-apprenticeship training and training on DIY for residents.

All our construction partners continue to provide social value to our Westminster residents including renovating resident halls, providing DIY training, supporting local schools, contributing to local events.

Our employment team and social value have now supported 61 residents into employment or apprenticeships since April.

### **Community Halls**

Both Barrow Hill and Dryburgh Hall have been refurbished and are much more appropriate venues for residents to use. The contractor Axis will now renovate Pickering Hall as part of their social value commitment.

Tollgate Hall, a brand-new hall for residents, was handed over in December and a launch is being planned for April or May when residents have returned to the estate.

## **13. Tenant Management Organisations**

### **TMO 5-year review (Audits)**

The TMO audit review is now nearing completion. Odhams Walk TMO and Lilestone Co-operative have completed all outstanding actions. 12 actions remain across the remaining TMOs. Millbank and Hide Tower TMOs each have a single action to complete. Warning Notices were served on Carlton Vale RMO and Tavistock Co-op on 27 February 2020. There remains a risk that TMOs may not comply. Progress is being monitored and appropriate enforcement action will be considered which could involve removal of services.

### **TMO Repairs & WCC recharges**

Notice of Disputes have been served on four TMOs that are withholding payment for repairs undertaken by the City Council on their behalf. In future, repair requests received by the Council for TMOs will be passed to the TMOs for action.

### **TMO Health & Safety Audit**

The City Council has recently carried out H&S audits on all eight TMOs. The audits have identified better systems of work for both the individual TMOs and the City Council. Two of the eight TMOs are working through the audit recommendations with their health & safety advisor. The remaining six TMOs have now appointed their own advisor and are working to complete the actions by the end of March 2020.

#### **14. Housing Solutions Service**

The Housing Solutions Service (HSS) delivered in partnership by RMG, Shelter and Passage, continues to work hard in achieving positive prevention outcomes with families and single adults who present as homeless. Year to date figures for the financial year show the service have achieved a prevention outcome in 78% of cases, which were owed a prevention duty. These have been through a range of methods such as our private sector lettings team, Westlets, mediation work to secure a return to family or friends, or to prevent evictions and repossession, and financial assistance to households who found their own accommodation in the private sector.

As part of the continuous improvement and development of the service, and following feedback from customers and consultation with various stakeholders, there has been a review of the effectiveness of Personalised Housing Plans (PHP's) over the last quarter with a focus on improved customer engagement with the plan, individualised content, including wider categories and activities. The new plans came into effect as of January 2020 and will enable both staff and customers to agree and work to plans that have tailored information, providing clearer and more defined activities which will enable the plans to be more meaningful and increase positive outcomes.

The WCC HSS contract continues to be one of the highest performing contracts in delivering its social value commitments throughout Westminster. Through the contract's comprehensive social value programme, they have delivered activities focusing on employment, supporting economic independence, having a positive impact on quality of life, as well as creating capacity for resilient communities. Some recent activity and highlights are the RMG sponsorship during December of a Christmas market stall on Tachbrook for start-ups and community groups, and the award RMG's community grants to the three selected charities; MEWSO, who work hard on tackling social isolation amongst Middle Eastern Women, the Connaught Opera who arrange and perform concerns for older people across Westminster and the Door Step Library who provide opportunities for children to read and learn outside of schools and libraries, who may be in areas of disadvantage. The cheques were presented by RMG Managing Director Hugh McGeever at an afternoon tea an afternoon tea event hosted by Westminster Council at in City Hall.

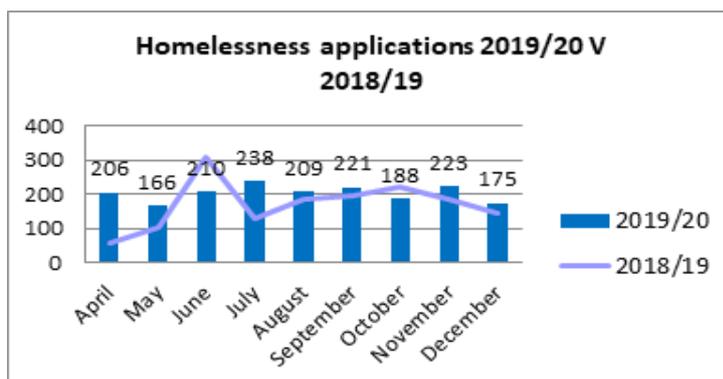
#### **15. Temporary Accommodation: meeting Demand from Households in Housing Need**

Demand for housing has been in line with the projections set out in previous reports to the Committee, with current Temporary Accommodation (TA) numbers remaining in the circa of 2,740 and an average of approximately 215 applications per month being made under the new Homeless Reduction Act legislation.

Local authorities have a legal requirement to provide suitable TA if there is reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need. Westminster acquires some temporary accommodation by leasing properties from the private sector for both emergency and longer-term use. There are existing arrangements with around 30 organisations including registered providers.

The Council is required to offer suitable TA to accepted homeless households pending allocation into longer term accommodation. Westminster continues to deliver a wide range of support to homelessness families who occupy temporary accommodation which includes:

- Support to households to access employment and move into work
- Debt advice and money management
- Outreach support to where people live in temporary accommodation



There is a focus in 2020/21 to achieve the targets set within the Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024. Supporting the plan to achieve:

- A clear, effective focus on preventing and responding effectively to homelessness
- Prioritising settled housing for residents who occupy TA by developing a well-functioning TA management service
- Partners working together, bringing insight, creativity and expertise to further reduce homelessness
- 

## 16. Response to recommendations of the Anti-Social Behaviour on Estates Task Group

The Anti-Social Behaviour on Estates Task Groups report was published in 2019 and the recommendations contained within the report have been subsequently considered. A response on the delivery of those recommendations is attached to this report at Appendix 1.