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Portfolio: Business and Planning

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Business and Planning
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COVID-19 Recovery

1 Hardship Rate Relief Screening Appointments

- 1.1 Five redeployees from Planning have joined the Business Unit in supporting the Business Rates team. The team screen applications for Hardship Rate Relief to ensure that businesses are eligible to apply and ensuring that they have received any other support they are eligible for.
- 1.2 A total of 305 one to one appointments have been conducted with businesses. As a result of these appointments taking place, we have been able to identify a number of businesses which were eligible for other financial support. So far, a total of £2,024,894.24 worth of alternative support has been identified and awarded to businesses. This amount is still likely to increase as there are further businesses which have been identified as potentially eligible for alternative funding awaiting to be confirmed. This alternative financial support is a combination of government grants, small business rate relief and expanded rate relief.

2 Rapid Response Digital Skills Training or High Street Businesses

- 2.1 The Business & Enterprise Service has partnered with “Three” and “Imperial Business School” to deliver free digital skills training to Westminster businesses. The training aims to support businesses, particularly on the high-street, to continue to trade and deliver their goods to their customers in spite of COVID-19. The training responds to a specific demand in Westminster to support high-street businesses with developing an online presence, social media promotion, online trade and managing logistics with regards to stock management and delivery of goods. The training is open to all Westminster businesses and covers the following topics:
- How to go about setting up a Google pin
 - How to create a website for free but also options for professional website development
 - How to drive traffic to a business website
 - Search Engine Optimisation

- How to develop a social media presence and use these platforms as a means of business promotion
- How to conduct online transactions and the creation of the technical functionality required to take online payments
- How hospitality businesses can set up digital customer registration for track and trace
- Identifying the most appropriate and sustainable fulfilment partner to manage logistics, stock management and delivery
- How to bootstrap it/do it yourself if you're not large enough to warrant partnering with a fulfilment partner at this time
- Signposting to a directory of couriers, local and eco-friendly freight methods
- Signposting to a directory of platforms where businesses can self-promote their products, goods and services i.e. ShopAppy.com, Not on the High Street, Etsy etc
- Peer-to-peer mentoring in relation to online trade and delivery (Westminster businesses sharing experiences with each other)

2.2 32 businesses were supported in the first cohort in September 2020. The training course commenced for the second cohort the week commencing 26 October 2020. A final cohort will be supported in mid-November.

3 Commercial Property Advice Seminars

3.1 The Business & Enterprise Service has collaborated with the GLA and Gerald Eve LLP to provide free masterclasses, one-to-one sessions and online resources and guidance to micro-and small businesses on the topics of business rates and lease negotiation. Many established small businesses face being displaced from their existing premises due to sharp property price increases proposed by their landlords and are having to find new premises in other parts of London that may meet their needs. The current COVID-19 circumstances have significantly altered the negotiations of leases and has made the introduction of this specialist advice service all the more timely/relevant.

4 Expert Professional Panel and Helpline to support Westminster's businesses in crisis

4.1 The Business & Enterprise Service is convening a professional panel of expert organisations willing to provide pro-bono support to businesses in crisis. In many cases there may be elements of the business that owners may need to consider such as restructuring, raising finance, pivoting into more profitable areas, identifying salvageable aspects of the business, staff redeployment, and where it is ultimately unavoidable, managing redundancy processes and business closure processes professionally and responsibly. The professional panel can undertake an independent evaluation of the business and help the owner to determine the right course of action to take.

4.2 This programme's overarching goal is to support businesses to reorganise, adapt and pivot away from existential challenges enough so they can weather this difficult period of major economic adjustment and bounce back when the economy starts to improve again. However, in cases where closure is unavoidable it seeks to ensure businesses are wound down responsibly and ethically and that the employees of these businesses are supported through this process via a proactive and timely 'Response to Redundancy' service. This is to be offered by the Westminster Employment Service (WES) and Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and a range of education and training providers to re-skill, up-skill and identify alternative employment opportunities. By the City Council intervening

in this way and at this time, we can assist in mitigating the impacts of the recession locally.

4.3 We will convene an open and inclusive expert professional panel through a partner search/call. We anticipate many of the panellists coming from Westminster's well-established financial and professional services sector or via relevant companies with social value commitments to the City of Westminster. However, by ensuring that the panel remains open and inclusive, we will be able to attract a vast array of expert organisations wishing to offer their services and expertise to Westminster businesses on a pro-bono basis. Panellists will be organisations who are best placed to provide advice, guidance and support based on their expertise and professional disciplines. The expert professional panel will comprise of organisations covering the following disciplines:

- Lawyers
- Accountants
- Banks
- HR Specialists
- Leadership & Management Specialists
- Sales & Marketing/Business Development Specialists
- IT/Tech & Innovation Specialists
- Business Mentors & Coaches
- Restructuring/Investment Specialists
- Insolvency Practitioners

4.4 The support will be triaged by the Westminster Business Unit via a new dedicated helpline where core details of the business and their needs /challenges will be recorded. Businesses calling the helpline will be advised as part of the triage session with the Business Unit, as to which type of support is most relevant for the business. The Business & Enterprise Service will undertake due diligence checks on all prospective members of the panel and the panel will remain open and inclusive so as to avoid the City Council giving the impression that it endorses any supplier over another. To this end, it is imperative that the choice remains with the business to select a supplier so an online directory of experts on the panel will help them to self-select the supplier or service provider they wish to take up the service offer with.

4.5 The directory will be categorised according to professional disciplines/area of business need which will enable businesses to navigate and select the most relevant support. The details of the call, the business and the understood business need will then be passed on to the relevant supplier selected by the business. To ensure the service is highly responsive to the urgent circumstances the business finds themselves in, once the referral is made, the selected supplier must call the business back within 24 hrs (1 working day).

5 Business Preparedness & Continuity

5.1 In July 2020, the Business & Enterprise Service convened a working group with Westminster's BIDs, the New West End Security Group, PP&L and Prepare & Prevent colleagues specifically to support Westminster businesses with developing preparedness and continuity in light of COVID-19.

5.2 Many businesses are experienced in accounting for major events and incidents such as counter-terror related activity, within their risk registers and have therefore implemented various measures to mitigate the impacts of such risks. However, they have not previously had to factor in the risks and impacts posed by a pandemic. The need to support businesses to account for the risks, develop preparedness and robust continuity and resilience plans is further exacerbated by the anticipation that subsequent waves of

the virus is likely, as too is the deepening economic impact. By collaborating with Westminster's BIDs, we will ensure consistency of messaging and support measures.

- 5.3** A number of initiatives have been developed/are in development that will aid businesses in achieving preparedness, continuity & resilience. They aim to ensure that businesses are able to continue trading through the pandemic in a COVID-secure manner.

6 Pop-up Activation and New Business Development Programme

- 6.1** The Business & Enterprise Service is working at pace with teams across Economic Development, Regeneration, OSD, Cultural Policy, Place Shaping and Communications & Events to implement a new programme that aims to:

- respond quickly and effectively to the impact of COVID-19 on the high street to maximise opportunities to activate the vacant units whilst also supporting the creative and cultural sectors and start-up businesses;
- stimulate the appropriate development of small businesses with a focus on social enterprises, co-operatives and employee-led businesses; and
- develop a programme of wrap around support that maximises opportunities for self-employment, including support for those seeking to invest their redundancy packages in starting their own business, and addresses the barriers to starting a business in Westminster.

- 6.2** This presents an exciting opportunity to trial and test innovative uses of Westminster's ground floor spaces to contribute to a more resilient, inclusive and thriving local economy post-Covid. The programme will be delivered in two phases.

- 6.3** Phase 1 – This phase of the programme will address the immediate need to activate retail frontages over the coming months with a particular focus on the West End which is seeing unprecedented levels of void units. It will entail the activation and curation of void spaces using creative installations, displaying local creative talent, working with existing UK and international brands and showcasing innovative start-ups. We will work collaboratively with key stakeholders in the West End including New West End Company, The Crown Estate, Grosvenor, Portman Estates and Shaftesbury to build upon existing proposals and to trial and test innovative ideas in the West End.

- 6.4** We will facilitate proposals with landlords and commercial property agents to provide further meanwhile uses in ground floor units supporting creative, community, training and cultural Pop-ups. Examples of this could include showcasing predominantly online retail businesses such as independent ethical fashion brands in addition to working with international brands and designers to showcase upcoming talent. There is an opportunity to develop Oxford Street as a 'show room' displaying the most innovative and forward-thinking brands, that may have a large online following but no physical store presence.

- 6.5** Phase 2 - This phase of the programme will seek out people who are looking to start a new business particularly those that will have a social/community/environmental business focus. We will focus on supporting:

- Westminster residents, including a priority focus on female and BAME residents
- Central London residents looking to start a business in Westminster
- Unemployed and recently made redundant
- Furloughed workers with self-employment aspirations
- Young people leaving school/college

- 6.6** We will create the right environment and support for the development of social impact, environmental and community businesses within Westminster, providing them with the

opportunity to occupy vacant ground floor spaces and contribute to a more resilient and inclusive economy. We will provide a free business support course focused on the social, community, environmental sectors. After participants complete the course, they will be further supported by the Business Unit to find a suitable empty premise and will receive further support through coaching, workspace, a network and funding opportunities. We will work with a social sector organisation to deliver a course focused on people in the early stages of setting up a social enterprise or community business.

- 6.7** Once the course has been delivered, businesses that are identified as suitable to take over a vacant unit, will be matched to premises relevant to their business venture, ensuring that it compliments existing activity on the high street through a targeted approach. In addition to the West End being a key priority for occupation of vacant units, the following local centres will also be supported: Church Street, Harrow Road, Pimlico, Bayswater, Mayfair, Baker Street and Marylebone.
- 6.8** To provide further support to businesses capable of taking over a vacant space, capital grants will be awarded to support the refurbishment of assets to bring them into use by businesses. An initial proposal is to make available £2,500 grants for Pop-up uses and £5,000-£10,000 grants for longer term uses for businesses that align with council priorities. This capital funding is part of the reconfigured 'Stimulating the Economy' Capital Programme Spending Review (CPSR) and is currently being reviewed due to be confirmed in early November.

7 Westminster Investment Service

- 7.1** Westminster has typically not needed to focus on attracting inward investment with its attractive central location, vibrant retail, leisure and hospitality scene, impressive cultural offer, highly skilled workforce and transport links. However, with high levels of unemployment, thousands of vacant units and increasing numbers of business deaths as a result of the economic impact of COVID-19, combined with growing uncertainty around the impact of Brexit, interventions will be needed to support the economy back to pre-COVID levels, provide jobs to residents and help influence the type of economy we want to see in the future for Westminster.
- 7.2** The new Westminster Investment service, based within the Business and Enterprise team, will attract sustainable investment to Westminster that will focus on the re-occupation of vacant units, contribute to the creation and safeguarding of employment and stimulate economic growth. This will be achieved through attracting new inward investment and retaining and supporting the growth of indigenous businesses calling Westminster their home.
- 7.3** The vision for the service is to build on Westminster's success to date in attracting high-growth international business and helping local entrepreneurs to scale, to continue to market Westminster as a world leading global city and to develop an even higher quality of offer for workers, residents and visitors going forward. The service will have the following objectives:
- Attract sustainable investment to Westminster to contribute to the creation of employment and stimulate and accelerate economic growth.
 - Encourage and support London based entrepreneurs to scale their businesses within Westminster and safeguard opportunities for residents.
 - Encourage and support UK based businesses to locate within the borough, offering them a light introduction to a London option.
 - Address the loss of occupied active frontages in the West End by identifying new occupiers and supporting them to launch successfully.

- 7.4 The service will be delivered by working collaboratively and building upon activities already being carried out by key stakeholders, particularly London and Partners who already focus on bringing FDI into London and the central London BIDs, such as New West End Company and HOLBA which fund inward investment/destination promotion activity. We will work with the infrastructure and processes that are already in place and will provide an enhanced offer that can demonstrate and showcase the value of locating a business in Westminster.
- 7.5 The key partners and stakeholders that will be involved in delivering this service include:
- **London and Partners** - international trade, investment and promotion agency for London, on average secures around 18 new business investments in Westminster per year.
 - **Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates** – we will capitalise on the fact that Westminster is home to a significant number of international Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates and encourage the Lord Mayor of Westminster to develop engagement and international connections to promote and support the work of the Westminster Investment Service.
 - **London First** - a business campaigning force, with over 200 members, that are uniquely placed to champion the city and help keep London competitive.
 - **The Great Estates** – including Grosvenor, Portman Estates, Crown Estate and Shaftesbury who have their own inward investment programmes.
 - **Westminster Business Improvement Districts** – 14 BIDs across Westminster with a vested interest in their geographic district and many have their own inward investment programme.
 - **Westminster Commercial Property Agents and Property Owners** – including the industry representative group, Westminster Property Association which represents the voice of property owners and looks to drive the economic prosperity of Westminster.
 - **Visit London** – visitor guide to London showcasing the best cultural and hospitality offers the city provides.
 - **Westminster universities** – including King’s College London, Imperial College, LSE, London Business School which consistently rank as some of the best universities in the world and can provide a skilled labour force for prospective businesses.
 - **Westminster 100** – to be developed as part of the service and will include Westminster’s strategically significant businesses with which the council can maintain a proactive working relationship, that will help to showcase the best of what Westminster has to offer and influence inward investment decisions. The Wiltshire 100 will include key hospitality, leisure and cultural businesses in Westminster that can support our investment concierge experience.
- 7.6 The Westminster Investment service is an opportunity to influence the types of business we want to be located in the borough. Working collaboratively with our partners, we will strategically identify and target the businesses we would like to see located in Westminster. The sectors identified as having the highest growth potential include cleantech, digital and health. In addition to looking at growth potential, the policies of an organisation, such as paying London Living Wage, employing local residents and using a local supply chain, will be considered to maximise the benefits for Westminster residents.
- 7.7 The service will then provide a ‘Concierge Offer’ that will provide a tailored approach to the interested business highlighting the borough’s relevant unique selling points e.g. Soho’s renowned status as a creative and cultural hub. We will work with existing companies in Westminster to showcase the best of the borough through hospitality and

cultural organisations and we will link potential investors to property agents, universities and existing local businesses in order to make the transition as seamless and impactful as possible.

8 Westminster Wheels

- 8.1** Building on the remarkable response of the community during the pandemic and as a front line offer to support greening initiatives, vibrant communities and digital access and skills, we are developing an ambitious new community project, *Westminster Wheels*. This programme aims to refurbish 2,000 bikes per annum delivered by 30 unemployed residents including care leavers.
- 8.2** The initiative will divert unwanted bikes from becoming waste to provide affordable refurbished bikes, focusing on low income families impacted by COVID-19. The ambition is to build a sustainable business through the sale of bikes. In addition, it will donate circa 20% bikes every year to encourage young people from vulnerable families to cycle and help them attend work and training.
- 8.3** Taster days for the Westminster Wheels project started on Monday 26 October. Throughout September and October, premises have been identified which will serve as a workshop and shop for the project and bike businesses have been engaged to support the project. Our aim is to open both the shop and workshop in December following fit out of an old bookmaker's on Church Street.

9 Westminster Employment Service (WES)

- 9.1** The Council has designed two mentoring and employment support projects which will utilise Westminster Connect Volunteers and help the job prospects of residents. Mentors are currently being trained through our partners 'One Westminster' and 'Groundwork London' with the aim to train 70 volunteers by the end of March 2021 to support our Employment Services' clients.
- 9.2** Short, employer-led training courses delivered by WAES commenced in September with 3 week training, Level 1 Qualification in Public Service. In November, courses covering Childcare and Social Care will commence and our aim is to help the progression of clients into roles within the Council and with our suppliers and businesses that have vacancies and want to support local communities.
- 9.3** A new financial capability and wellbeing coach joined the team on 5 October 2020. Over the next six months they will be engaging with families in need of financial capability and wellbeing support in Churchill Gardens to help them maximise their incomes, reduce their debt, help them to make affordable repayment arrangements and make onward referrals to external services to help with any wellbeing issues. They will be working collaboratively with colleagues in the Bessborough Family Hub to generate referrals from the community.
- 9.4** Our financial capability officer delivered a training session through the Advisor Academy on financial capability and Universal Credit (UC), on 21 September. The aim of the training was to provide coaches and other colleagues with the tools that are used by members of the team providing this offer, so that they can confidently provide this support to clients. The training covered better-off in work calculations, personal budgeting, income maximisation, an overview of UC and how to make referrals to financial capability support for more complex cases. The training was well attended by WES coaches and we also had colleagues from Housing and Westminster Employment (WE) attend.

- 9.5** More detail on WES recovery activities and programmes are set out in a separate full report on this Committee agenda.

10 Planning Recovery

- 10.1** The Planning Department continues to operate efficiently despite the continued need for the majority of staff to work remotely. As noted in the previous report to Committee, a site visit protocol was introduced in September and this enabled site visits to occur for applications where this is necessary to establish the acceptability of the proposals.
- 10.2** With England returning to a 4-week lockdown period as of 5 November, the Planning Department will take a view on site visits and consider alternative solutions should site visits not be able to take place.

11 Virtual Planning Committees and Inquiries

- 11.1** To date, there have been 15 virtual Planning Applications Sub-Committee meetings. The meetings initially attracted high viewing figures (247 views on 14 April, 129 on 28 April and 133 on 12 May). This was due to a combination of a backlog of major and complex cases resulting in more viewers per item along with significant interest from the development industry, other local authorities and academic observers interested in how the Council had responded to the constraints imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.
- 11.2** Following the third virtual committee meeting on 26 May, viewer numbers have steadily transitioned back towards expected average levels of between 40 to 80 viewers, depending upon the number of items on a given agenda and scale and complexity of the applications under consideration. This viewer level is consistent with the viewer levels experienced prior to the switch to virtual planning committees.
- 11.3** Since the beginning of lockdown in March 2020, Planning Applications Sub-Committees have been operating using Microsoft Teams video conferencing software, following the coming in to force of temporary legislation to enable virtual public meetings on 2 April 2020. Prior to this, between February and March 2020 the planning committee meetings had begun to be live streamed and recorded using Civico software, which is a software platform specifically designed to stream and record conventional office based local authority public meetings. The virtual meetings using Microsoft Teams commenced on 9 April and public speaking for Ward Councillors was reintroduced at the Sub-Committee meeting on 12 May, with other speakers able to make verbal representations from 26 May onwards.
- 11.4** The proportion of viewers watching the recordings of the committee meetings subsequent to the live streaming of the event is relatively low at present (11% of total viewers on average). This may be a result of the link to the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting recordings being less visible and accessible relative to the Civico system, which hosts all of the recordings made prior to April 2020 on a single easily navigable home screen embedded within the Council's website. Conversely, the Microsoft Teams meeting recordings are only accessible via the link embedded in the committee meeting agenda. To resolve this and other limitations resulting from the use of Microsoft Teams planning committees will move back to the Civico software platform by the end of November 2020, following Civico's development of a remote app that allows their software to now host virtual public meetings. The new Civico app will also enable easier

future transition to hybrid planning committee meetings and beyond that a return to conventional office-based committee meetings.

- 11.5** Most planning appeals are dealt with by way of written representations and as a result these have been impacted to only a limited extent by the coronavirus pandemic. A small number of appeals are heard by Inspectors by way of hearings or public inquiries. The public inquiry for the Holocaust Memorial was held in October and early November. Officers have worked collaboratively to ensure the inquiry can proceed virtually without undue delay. The inquiry has been held using Microsoft Teams for participants and has been available to view as a live stream and as recordings on YouTube. This has ensured that the inquiry proceedings have been more publicly accessible than had it been held conventionally in committee room, whilst also maintaining the ability of interested parties to contribute to the inquiry process.

12 Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) recovery

- 12.1** All the curriculum areas have planned their provision to meet learners' needs and sweeping changes have been introduced. Our entry level learners are the most vulnerable and, therefore, WAES is delivering more face-to-face learning for this group. Similarly, those areas requiring practical skills development have more face-to-face learning planned. WAES have also introduced streaming between classrooms to allow all learners to benefit from the learning, while still practising safe social distancing.
- 12.2** WAES has invested in specialist software to provide those learners who require it more opportunities, while studying remotely in accounting and maths. Some of this provision is now 100% online. WAES has achieved 99% of its Term 1 enrolment target to date and has also secured additional COVID-19 Response Funding from the GLA to assist learners into work, acquire digital skills and help with mental health.
- 12.3** WAES has prioritised the discretionary support fund to support learners with IT equipment so they can engage effectively in online learning. To date, WAES has supported more than 50 learners with equipment. This is in addition to the usual childcare and travel support that is provided routinely. In addition, we have adapted the learning centres in our three sites to allow learners to book the use of computers to either engage in their online lessons or for traditional working. This has been done to allow learners who are not socially mobile or have the appropriate home environment to undertake online learning.
- 12.4** A collaboration between WAES and WES has been established to allow employment-related training to directly impact Westminster residents. These are short intensive programmes. There is a full plan for the entire academic year and our first two cohorts of learners were 100% Westminster residents. WAES is also working closely with the Job Centre on employer-led training opportunities, where all learners participating are guaranteed interviews for real jobs. Our first Sector-Based Work Academy is due in November 2020.

13 Hospitality

- 13.1** The second phase of the Movement Strategy was focused on the opening of the hospitality sector in the City. Since July, the council has offered an extensive package of

help for food and beverage businesses, including temporary measures to facilitate outdoor dining, extended until the end of October 2020.

13.2 Feedback from surveys undertaken with premises, local businesses, stakeholders and residents demonstrated how valuable these measures had been. Some of the results indicated that:

- an estimated 500 businesses benefitted from the schemes;
- 75% of those surveyed would recommend outdoor dining in Westminster;
- 84% residents and visitors felt positively about the council helping local businesses to reopen;
- 73% agreed with the temporary measures, including timed road closures, pathway extensions and the use of parking bays; and
- 75% key stakeholders believed the temporary measures rolled out by the council had increased footfall in their area since lockdown had eased, in some cases more than 50%.

13.3 The council is extending alfresco dining schemes into the winter months, with a comprehensive guide available to businesses explaining the council's support for heaters and umbrellas and associated application process, 'winter appropriate' schemes to support al fresco hospitality, and outdoor table and chair processes. Businesses are consulting with residents and other businesses on these schemes to ensure their viability and appropriateness.

Operational Issues

14 City Plan

14.1 Public hearings took place between 28 September and 15 October 2020 and delved into detail of every policy in the City Plan and the evidence supporting them. The hearings were run by the independent planning inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State.

14.2 Much time was devoted to exploring the housing supply evidence and discussion on the principle of affordable housing contributions from commercial development and on the building height policy. All of the hearings were recorded and are available on the council's website to watch.

14.3 Upon conclusion of the hearings, the Inspectors stated that, with their proposed modifications, the Plan can be found sound. This is an entirely normal outcome for a local plan examination and the council has in fact proposed a number of modifications it would like to make to the Plan to improve its effectiveness. The Inspectors will be writing to the council to outline any further modifications it feels are necessary to make the plan sound. Those modifications will then be subject to a six week public consultation. It is likely that the consultation will close in early January and following this the Inspectors will write their final report which sets out how the Plan must be amended for it to be adopted. Receipt of the report concludes the examination and is the point at which the Plan can start to be used to determine planning applications. The plan can then be formally adopted at the next appropriate Full Council meeting.

15 Neighbourhood plans

15.1 The Soho and Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Plans are currently under examination by an independent examiner. Thus far the examiner has asked the council and Forums to agree a statement of common ground on the policies in the respective plans. Aside from these neighbourhood plans, a number of others are at an advanced stage of drafting,

however the council has advised Forums to wait for the outcome of the City Plan examination before progressing further given that neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted City Plan.

15.2 The designations of Pimlico and Victoria Neighbourhood Forums have expired and consultation on their re-designation closed on 16 October. The responses to that consultation are being considered and it is likely that they will be recommended for re-designation.

15.3 An application for the re-designation of Maida Hill Forum has been received and consultation will start soon.

16 Planning Review

16.1 The operational impacts on the planning service of the Planning Review are set out in a separate full report on this Committee agenda.

17 Ongoing public realm projects

17.1 The public realm programme has continued to be delivered throughout this period. There have been some minor delays in delivery due to staff resources being diverted to the delivery of the Movement Strategy and a pause in the private sector schemes coming forward. It is anticipated that this will be rectified across the second half of the year. A developing risk is the lack of engagement from Transport for London (TfL) on project delivery outside their London Street Space programme. This will have an impact on the schemes requiring signal change and modelling work. Discussions with TfL are ongoing.

17.2 We are on site at Queensway making improvements to the pedestrian environment by providing wider footways and removing loading from the road at peak times. We are also improving lighting, planting new trees and introducing cycle parking.

17.3 The renovation of Christchurch Gardens was completed in early September. The park has new planting, new seating opportunities, SUDS, new lighting, new natural stone and feature paving, a drinking water fountain, new trees and a panel commemorating Ignatius Sancho.

18 Ongoing place shaping projects

18.1 The original programme for delivery of Strand Aldwych was impacted by COVID-19. The programme has been revised to bring forward the delivery of a meanwhile version of the scheme, moving forward with the traffic changes along Aldwych. This will facilitate wider business and cultural recovery efforts in the area and provide the opportunity to test components of the management model towards the final scheme. It is to be noted that given the signalling changes and modelling work required around this scheme, the approval of traffic changes along Aldwych are reliant on TfL resource availability.

18.2 In regard to the Future Victoria project, whilst technical work has continued throughout lockdown, public engagement and engagement with TfL has been challenged as a consequence of the pandemic. The project ambition and intent to place public engagement at the heart of the design process remains intact. The programme has been revised to ensure that a robust engagement strategy is in place as lockdown lifts. Alternate means to engage and ensure community representation are currently being explored.

19 Markets

- 19.1** As part of our efforts to ensure Westminster's markets are COVID-secure, we have provided free face masks to all Westminster traders. Although face masks are not compulsory at outdoor markets, we are strongly encouraging traders to wear masks when serving customers. In addition, we have recently installed hand sanitiser dispensers at all of our markets, to ensure that traders and customers feel safe while on the markets. These sanitisers can hold 7L of hand gel and will be refilled on a weekly basis.
- 19.2** We recently rolled out our branded market banners at Strutton Ground, Maida Hill, Rupert Street and Berwick Street markets. This follows Tachbrook Street market, where the banners were installed earlier this year. The banners will also be installed at Church Street shortly once we have finalised the size of the banners, as we are currently exploring the possibility of installing larger banners at Church Street.
- 19.3** Following a study at Church Street which found that almost 60% of the recyclable waste generated at the market is cardboard but the majority is not recycled due to contamination, we are devising a new waste management strategy. This will see traders separating cardboard from general waste and will require an extra operative from Veolia, who will collect the separated cardboard waste.
- 19.4** Following the success of the Caulibox Reusable Lunchbox Scheme pilot at Tachbrook Street market,¹ we are now working with Caulibox to further develop the scheme. This will see us develop an app to improve user experience and eliminate human error. Additionally, a tech focused drop off point that is able to recognise boxes being deposited to avoid cross contamination issues and investment in multiple box sizes to accommodate for different food portion sizes. In line with our commitment to end the use of single use plastic and improve the sustainability of our markets, we have partnered with a sustainable packaging provider, Element. We have negotiated a discounted rate for Westminster traders (<https://westminster.myelement.co.uk/>) and are working together to design Westminster-branded sustainable packaging.
- 19.5** The Peter Street storage unit has been transformed into a modernised storage unit, with upgraded facilities. The newly installed fridges have been allocated to traders and a new charging system is being designed with Avison Young, to be implemented once the rent-free period comes to an end.
- 19.6** As part of our vision to expand Maida Hill market, we have reached an agreement with the Housing team to take over two vacant garages beneath the Lydford Road housing estate and transform them into a new storage unit for the market. This will replace the existing storage unit on Elgin Avenue when the current lease expires in December.

20 Digital Street Markets

- 20.1** The Digital Street Markets Project is split into two elements; a Wi-Fi network for each of Westminster's markets and a digital training programme.
- 20.2** The procurement for the Wi-Fi operator began on 18 August. All of the bids were evaluated and moderated on 14 October and a price and quality score were determined

¹ See page 3, 1.14 of the previous Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Education and Skills' report to the Economic Development, Education, Skills and Place Shaping Policy and Scrutiny Committee, September 2019 (https://westminster.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s33905/Item_5_Cllr%20Barnes%20PS%20Report.pdf)

for all bidders. The project will be going to the Procurement Advisory Board on 10 November to agree contract award.

20.3 The other element of the project is a digital training programme to support traders and small businesses to make use of the improved connectivity that they have available to them. A key purpose to this training is to support businesses to improve turnover and help drive customers to the market areas. Before going out to procurement, the specification is being revised to reflect the different delivery models for the training that will be required due to changing COVID regulations. Once completed, an OJEU procurement will be carried out to secure the best possible training provider.

20.4 To support greater participation in the training we are working with the Westminster Adult Education Service to develop an ESOL course tailored to the type of language that is used on both the Digital and Enterprise Training Courses.

21 Mayor's Workspace Accreditation Programme

21.1 Two enterprise spaces that were catalysed by the Business & Enterprise Service as part of the City Council's Enterprise Space Programme have successfully achieved the Mayor of London's Workspace Accreditation. Pop-Hub Leicester Square (Interim Spaces) and Somerset House Studios Trust (The Exchange) were both awarded the accreditation on 15 October at the Mayor's Workspace Event. Westminster joined 8 other London Boroughs in the Workspace Accreditation Scheme's Pilot which commenced in February this year. Workspaces were assessed and evaluated against a number of metrics including: Affordability, Business Support, Community Impact and Responsible Business.

22 Westminster Adult Education Service

22.1 WAES received an interim visit from Ofsted on 29 and 30 September 2020. The purpose of the visit was not judgemental but to see how the sector has responded to the pandemic. The report is complimentary about the processes that WAES has used and highlights areas of good practice for the sector.

22.2 In October, WAES held its first ever Higher Education (HE) Careers fair, which focused on inspiring learners to think big and plan for their futures. There were career-planning workshops with a focus on applying for jobs in a digital world, including how to make your LinkedIn profile pop. It featured the following universities delivering insight sessions and answering questions to encourage more young people and adults into HE:

- University of Westminster
- University of East London
- Goldsmiths University of London
- University of West London
- Birkbeck University of London
- London South Bank University

22.3 Other guest speakers included staff from Matrix, National Careers Services and the Westminster Employment Service. The sessions were well attended, with over 100 learners participating.