

Community Services, Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Monday 9 November 2020
The Report Of:	Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital
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This report seeks to update the committee on matters pertaining to the Community Services and Digital portfolio focusing on:

1. COVID-19 Response and Recovery; and
2. Operational Updates.

1. COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

1.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORTS (PALS)

1.1.1 LEISURE CENTRES

In order to ensure that we can continue to provide our much-valued leisure centre services during these difficult times, and having reviewed usage levels since re-opening, we announced on Monday 26 October that there will be a temporary reduction in opening hours across all our leisure centres from 1 November. All leisure centres will remain open (when they are permitted to do so) and to compensate for the reduction in opening hours, all memberships will be upgraded to 'multi-site' access from 1 November so users can attend all leisure centres across the City. As a result of this multi-site access, after 1 November, there will be the opportunity to attend a leisure centre in Westminster from 6.30am to 10pm weekdays and 7am to 8.30pm on weekends. If a local centre is not open, there will be alternative provision close by that will be.

However, in-line with the Prime Minister's recent announcement of a four-week lockdown in England, sadly our leisure centres will now also be required to temporarily close from Thursday 5 November. When leisure centres can reopen, we will revert back to the reduced opening hours introduced on 1 November and the 'multi-site access' upgrade to all memberships will also remain in place. Information and advice will be updated on our website as soon as further details become available.

1.2.1 ACTIVESTREETS PROGRAMME

The temporary School Streets programme, as reported previously, continues to remain in place during term time. The temporary School Streets programme involves localised improvements to increase pedestrian space at schools across Westminster, and will remain in place as an emergency measure until December 2020.

As a reminder, School Streets are pedestrian and cycle zones outside the school main entrance usually in operation for up to an hour and a half in the morning and afternoon (to complement the school drop-off and collection times), Monday to Friday term-time only.

1.2 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)

1.2.1 WESTMINSTER CONNECTS

In preparation for winter, we have redeployed 20 additional staff into the Westminster Connects service to provide more support to vulnerable residents, including the shielding; people over the age of 70 who are living alone; and people made vulnerable through hardship.

Before the announcement made by Government that England will be entering a second lockdown from Thursday 5 November, the teams had been reaching out to the shielding group via letter, and from Monday 26 October, this also included automated telephone calls. This has enabled residents to contact Westminster Connects by phone or through the automated response, so we can call them back and refer them to the service they need. As of the end of October, we have received requests for help about safeguarding, wellbeing, shopping, and medicine collection, and have been referring residents into the services provided by community partners and the Council. During the last week of October, calls to the Westminster Connects helpline increased by 50%, with a total of 357 calls.

Following the recent announcement regarding a second lockdown for England, the Westminster Connects team have begun to meet with wellbeing providers, food bank and shopping providers to help streamlining referrals and making sure there is capacity across Westminster during lockdown. Westminster Connects works closely with our voluntary sector partners who deliver these services to make sure they have the resources they need, to refer volunteers to them, to support with practical problem solving of logistical issues, and to maintain good levels of support for residents across the borough, and communication between organisations.

The Westminster Connects team have also increased our call outs for volunteers for drivers to help with deliveries, as well as volunteers to help provide wellbeing and befriending support.

1.3 CULTURE

On 12 October, we delivered a Culture Network event, which was attended by 73 representatives of our cultural and creative sectors. It was as an inclusive online forum to focus on sharing good practice in terms of responses to the pandemic situation. Richard Watts, an expert in cultural organisation development and Founder Director of 'People Make It Work', was invited to facilitate the event and present about national cultural recovery trends. The Council's Cultural Policy and Projects Officer (CPPO) curated the event programme that included the presentations from 10 Westminster-based organisations.

We recognise the pandemic has hit the cultural and creative sectors disproportionately hard and have continued to provide support. We have scheduled a further two conference calls with key cultural stakeholders, hosted by the Leader, in mid-November and mid-December. The purpose of these calls is to find out about whether the Arts Council Recovery grants announced on 15 October are sufficient to support organisations to continue until Spring 2021, and whether the Council can do more to support the return of visitors to cultural districts through, for instance, further adaptations to the public realm to support outdoor queuing, hospitality activities and events.

1.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

On Monday 26 October, we hosted our first online Open Forum event using Facebook Live, which received 129 simultaneous 'live' views. The video has been made available to watch following the event, and has now received over 1300 views. These figures equal or improve on the previous two Leader's Facebook Live events held on 17 April 2020 and 29 May 2020. During the event, many questions were responded to 'live' covering the main theme of climate emergency and the environment, as well as our COVID-19 response and other issues of concern to our residents. Those questions or comments that there was not time to address 'live' will have received a written response from the Council.

Open Forum events will be held quarterly, and each event will have a different theme; themes for future events can be based on different ways the Council is supporting recovery and other topics of interest to Westminster residents. Events will be held solely online with the potential to move towards a hybrid of

digital and face-to-face for future events, once national Government advice allows larger-scale face-to-face meetings.

1.5 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

1.5.1 WEBSITE

Following the Government's announcement to move London into Tier 2, we updated the Council's corporate website homepage and COVID-19 information structure. This included an updated main (hero) homepage image to clearly reflect the new restrictions, a colour-coded banner across the site, and the re-ordering and prioritisation of practical information for residents and businesses. Our 'Westminster is Open' campaign information was also updated to encourage visitors to the area, but with a continued and enhanced focus on socialising responsibly.

We continue to see increased visitor numbers to the Council's corporate website week on week, with a significant boost in traffic over the last three weeks to all coronavirus resources.

With the Government's announcement that England will be entering a second lockdown from Thursday 5 November, the Council's corporate website underwent further changes to provide refreshed information and guidance for residents and businesses. The website's COVID-19 content is reviewed regularly, with decisions made based on changes to restrictions and real user data, to surface the right information at the right time.

1.5.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Public health and other recovery messaging is also continually promoted via the Council's corporate social media platforms, with new tactics trialled including the promotion of behaviour change messaging through influencers, and content tailored for young people. As engagement fatigue is evident with Public Health England and central government COVID-19 content, there has been an emphasis on more positive and locally-tailored communications encouraging engagement with the public (for example, the launch of a face-covering selfie call to action). The Council's recently-adopted Nextdoor platform is proving particularly useful for public health updates, with highly targeted information regularly shared about testing sites.

1.5.3 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

The IT team have continued to deliver priority digital projects to support the Council's response to COVID-19. These priority projects included developing:

- A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to store details of vulnerable residents who may require additional support services as a solution to allow residents to request our shopping support service;
- The provision of an online resident parking permit application and renewal service went live in August; and
- The Housing Contact Centre Telephony project to deliver new omni-channel capabilities including text and social media goes live at the end of October.

2. OPERATIONAL UPDATES

2.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORT (PALS)

2.1.1 PADDINGTON RECREATION GROUND: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT WORKS

Work continues to take place to further enhance the existing facilities at Paddington Recreation Ground and build upon the capital works undertaken and completed in Phase One. This includes:

- Upgrading and replacing the existing hockey pitch surfacing;
- Upgrading and replacing the water cannons to the upgraded replacement hockey pitch;
- Refurbishing spectator seating;

- Upgrading and replacing the existing 400 metre athletics track surface to match the new 60 metre sprint track; and
- Improving the landscaping and planting surround all the new facilities.

We anticipate Phase Two to be completed by Spring 2021.

In addition to this, the PALS team have recently secured circa £100,000 from the Little Venice and Maida Vale Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund, to provide some additions and enhancements to existing facilities at Paddington recreation Ground, particularly for children and young people. The additions and enhancements consist of 'Paddington Small World', Climbing Boulders, and the replacement 'Youth Shelter'.

2.1.2 LISSON GREEN PITCH

The new '3G' artificial turf pitch is now in place together with new fencing gates and upgraded floodlights at following completion at the end of September and successful site testing on 14 October. Minor works including the installation of benches and the possible inclusion of a water fountain are currently being investigated, and Westminster Housing work to finalise a Community Use Agreement to cover the management and operations of the pitch.

2.1.3 JUBILEE COMMUNITY LEISURE CENTRE

The contractor, Boshers, has been making good progress on main site works over the last two-months. A monthly community newsletter is now in place, as well as marketing site hoardings on-site to promote ActiveWestminster and the nineteen homes that will be provided by Westminster Builds as part of the development.

2.1.4 LUTON STREET COMMUNITY LEISURE CENTRE

The main site works are still making good progress, with the current forecast for practical completion of the leisure centre expected in July 2022, as reported previously.

2.1.5 QUEST ACTIVE COMMUNITIES (PLUS) ASSESSMENT

Under the Quest Active Communities (Plus) Assessment, our Year 2 Directional Review Improvement workshop took place in August after being postponed following national lockdown. In line with national government guidance, the assessment was carried out virtually. Westminster City Council was the first local authority to undertake a Quest assessment virtually and received the following branding - Active Communities (Plus) Directional Review 2020 - maintaining Very Good. A highlight quote from the assessors' report stated:

"The range of data and insight used to inform the development of strategies, plans and programmes. The partnership with 'Trust Impact' has added a new dimension to this work area and clearly moved the agenda on since the previous Quest Assessment. This work is continuing to develop and is an example of good practice. The focus on developing a 'fit for purpose' impact assessment tool will not only be important for Westminster but for the sector."

Our next truly integrated full Quest Active Communities (Plus) Assessment is now due in August 2021. As set out in the ActiveWestminster 2018 – 2022 Strategy, at the next assessment we will involve more partners, beyond Council and its main leisure contractor to continue to provide an external assessment of not just our organisational performance against our strategy objectives and priorities, but as the ActiveWestminster partnership and a place.

2.2 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)

2.2.1 WESTMINSTER CONNECTS

We have recently completed the rebranding of the Westminster Connects service. The new brand is bright and fresh and very much puts people connecting with people at the heart of it.

As a way of thanking the volunteers for their hard work and support, and as part of the rebrand of the service, we showcased films and photos of our volunteers for a week on the screens at iconic Piccadilly Circus in October.

2.3 CULTURE

As reported previously, the the publication of the Council’s Cultural Strategy has been delayed until Winter so the Council can take account of the recovery situation to ensure the strategy is fit for purpose and reflects the impacts of COVID-19. Work is underway to both revise the strategy, and prepare for the rescheduled launch.

2.3.1 CITY LIONS

City Lions has continued to offer a mainly online service to our young people, which has proved to be very popular. In conjunction with a move to a mainly online service in light of COVID-19, we expanded our City Lions website to include two portals giving advice on how to get into the creative industries, as well as fun social and educational activities that can be completed in a COVID-19 safe environment.

Even with the COVID-19 restrictions, we have been able to safely deliver our programmes to support residents with events and activities promoting economic, personal and social wellbeing, such as:

- An on-line weekly youth club (called City Lions Live);
- A blended three-day programme of online and face-to-face activities over half-term;
- A variety of online workshops celebrating creativity and creative industries, with the latest one celebrating Ada Lovelace and women in technology; and
- An intensive City Lions Programme for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) students of Marylebone Bridge School.

The City Lions team have been reviewing how we can best meet the needs of our young people in the future. For example, the City Lions team have been working to create Mentoring Programmes for disadvantaged young people at Westminster Academy through working with creative industries partners. We hope to roll out this programme across Westminster in the coming months.

2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

2.4.1 OPEN FORUM

We plan to host Open Forum events every quarter going forward, with the next event planned for early 2021. These will be themed to meet topics of particular interest to residents that tie into core areas of the Council’s work to ensure all events are valuable, informative and provide good opportunities to hear resident feedback and ideas.

2.4.2 WARD BUDGETS

At the end of October 2020, since May 2018, we have allocated £1,716,101.69 towards 362 ward budget projects. This means there is £1,043,898.31 remaining to be allocated towards ward budget projects until March 2022. A ward-by-ward breakdown of expenditure is available for reference in Figure 1 below.

FIGURE 1: WARD BUDGET ALLOCATION SINCE MAY 2018 TO END OF OCTOBER 2020 BY WARD

WARD	COMMITTED	REMAINING
Abbey Road	£94,232.71	£43,767.29
Bayswater	£98,141.29	£39,858.71
Bryanston and Dorset Square	£38,789.30	£99,210.70
Churchill	£101,401.78	£36,598.22
Church Street	£108,754.87	£29,245.13
Harrow Road	£126,023.69	£11,976.31
Hyde Park	£17,046.82	£120,953.18
Knightsbridge and Belgravia	£65,637.00	£72,363.00
Lancaster Gate	£47,600.27	£90,399.73

Little Venice	£78,684.24	£59,315.76
Maida Vale	£83,915.70	£54,084.30
Marylebone High Street	£111,667.87	£26,332.13
Queen's Park	£112,003.61	£25,996.39
Regent's Park	£71,657.17	£66,342.83
St James's	£86,474.39	£51,525.61
Tachbrook	£74,514.62	£63,485.38
Vincent Square	£81,296.96	£56,703.04
Warwick	£125,096.00	£12,904.00
Westbourne	£111,771.48	£26,228.52
West End	£81,391.92	£56,608.08

2.5 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

2.5.1 WEBSITE

The new Council corporate website is currently in the build phase, with all content updated and optimised in preparation for go-live. There have been some delays to go-live as focus has been turned to the Council's response to COVID-19 but we expect the new website to go-live in the new year.

As part of this optimised experience, we plan to migrate Westminster Housing's microsite into the new website, to enable a more streamlined user experience.

2.5.2 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS

The pandemic initially slowed down our digital transformation programme as IT staff were tasked with priority projects to support the Council's response to COVID-19; however, the IT team is continuing to work on the following transformation projects:

- The development of online licence application and management, initially targeting licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), Special Treatment Businesses, and Street Entertainment;
- The implementation of the capability to send text messages (SMS) to assist with COVID-19 support services;
- The creation of an online, user friendly process for registering for Free School Meals;
- The replacement of the existing Fraud Case Management System;
- The delivery of the ability for street-based Council officers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices through a full end-to-end mobile platform as part of the Mobile Working Project;
- The delivery of the Registrars Service Improvement Project, which will include a mobile payment system, self-checking kiosks, mobile printing, a comprehensive service and room booking system;
- The Online Housing Register Applications Project, which will replace paper-based housing application forms with an improved online solution;
- The CRM for Housing Project, which is set to improve the management of online service requests from residents;
- A public library room booking solution;
- The creation of a virtual library website to enhance our library service offering; and
- The Housing Self Appointing Repairs (SAR) service, which went live in August, delivering the capability for residents to log repairs appointments online.

2.5.3 INNOVATION HUB

The Council is creating an 'Innovation Hub' to foster innovation and creativity through collaboration between colleagues, partners, customers and interested parties as well as promoting learning and the sharing of ideas. The hub will be a relaxed physical space that is equipped with the latest digital technology where we can explore and identify opportunities for innovation, quickly design and test solutions with partners and customers. This will be an environment where we can fail fast and learn quickly and enable us to rapidly deliver excellent smart solutions.

2.5.4 SMART CITIES

The pandemic accelerated our ambition to become smarter in how we connect, collaborate and respond to challenges in the city. Technology continues to catalyse change in our ways of working and our communities have greater expectations around the way they engage with our services and what they expect from us.

Since March, use of our digital channels has seen record increases, becoming spaces where residents expect to be heard and to engage more directly. The Council has taken a customer focused approach to designing and delivering our services, using digital as the preferred option wherever possible whilst balancing the needs of our diverse communities and ensuring no-one is left behind. How we become a smart city will continue to evolve, as this path is central to all parts of our delivery.

In the context of COVID-19 and Renewal there has been a recognition that although activities to meet crucial 'smart' commitments are underway, there are gaps in our overall vision and strategy that need to be addressed at pace to deliver and maximise customer benefits long term.

To address this, several initiatives have been commenced with a team of urban innovation experts at PwC. The consultancy has been procured to support the Council with three interconnected pieces of work over the coming six months:

- **Visioning:** first, act as a catalyst to the council's evolving smart city strategy, taking a more collaborative and outward-looking view to our existing approach. The team will galvanise support, gather input and build momentum, as well as explore opportunities for investment and partnership. This will be delivered at an accelerated pace in November 2020;
- Secondly, **set a blueprint and roadmap** for the council's smart agenda, one which builds on our existing strengths as a smart city and 'City for All' commitments, whilst addressing gaps and missed opportunities identified. This is due to conclude in March 2021; and
- **'Smart' Oxford Street District:** in parallel to above, a place-based approach will be taken to this vision by assessing the potential for smart solutions in Oxford Street District specifically. Over the course of six months and three phases, technologies tailored to tackle site-specific challenges and opportunities will be explored and vetted based on multi-pronged research and engagement. This project is being delivered with a cross-departmental team between October 2020 and March 2021 and will be complimentary to the wider place shaping vision in the district.

2.5.5 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

Between the 21 August to 23 October 2020, we received 322 Stage 1 corporate complaints. This figure was up by 37 from the same period the previous year. For the same period, we received 29 Stage 2 corporate complaints, which was down 6 from the same period the previous year.

2.5.6 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

As the majority of Council staff continue to be supported with remote working solutions, the team plan to launch a new online IT support portal Tech Hub in November.

The IT team also continues to work on a range of technical enablement projects, such as the large scale migration of applications, services and data from the Council's servers to the Azure cloud to improve reliability, availability, supportability, and protection of services and by definition and adoption of a single-sign-on framework, a standard forms engine, a CRM and data warehouse datalink, a data retention policy, and a secure file transfer protocol. The third phase of the IT refurbishment of the Lisson Grove offices remains on track and is due to be completed in December.

2.5.7 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Following the approval of the Contact Centre Target Operating Model in June 2020, we have moved into full implementation mode, with the first stage being to run a proof of concept and test the assumptions and proposed future models of service. The proof of concept, starting with Housing Solutions, is progressing as per our plan. We have completed the detailed Discovery to validate the nature of calls and are currently analysing the findings to ensure the benefits to customers can be

maximised in the proceeding months. In parallel, we also commenced a similar detailed Discovery for Parking, which is also nearing completion.

The other aspect is procurement of a future provider, where we have completed the extension to Agilisys to May 2022. We are now working towards the procurement of the Assisted Services Hub to coincide with the end of a number of existing contracts. Overall these changes will lead to improvements in services received, greater consistency in messaging and also reductions in the overall costs of operating our contact centres.

2.6 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY

2.6.1 CONNECT WESTMINSTER (BUSINESSES)

The Connect Westminster voucher scheme has been running since August 2017, providing small £2,000 grants to SME's across Westminster. To date the project has received 1075 applications, and issued 949 vouchers totalling £2,131,724 in allocated funding. As a result of the scheme we have seen a 2,264% uplift in download speed and a 10,107% uplift in upload speed.

COVID-19 has had a minor impact on the project over the last year with the number of vouchers we have redeemed lower than we had expected, so we will be submitting a request to extend the projects delivery for another year. This will enable the team to ensure that all vouchers that have been submitted so far can be paid and the remaining funding can be allocated out to additional businesses. This will be a time extension only and not a request for additional funding.

2.6.2 CONNECT WESTMINSTER (RESIDENTIAL)

Prior to the initiation of the residential voucher scheme we have been undertaking connectivity mapping of the borough using data from the Ofcom report issued in May 2020. This has allowed us to create an initial colour-coded map showing the varying levels of connectivity at borough, ward, output area, and postcode level. This is a useful starting point as we can use this for our engagement work where we endeavour to utilise local knowledge to discover tangible levels of connectivity for residents, and any particular reasons areas may show as 'not-spots' but actually experience strong connectivity.

Our next steps are to source more data to accurately display property ownership at street level on a map, ramp up our engagement with ward members, providers, landlords, and residents, and finally collate all of our findings in order to identify a top ten 'not-spot' list to initially target with the scheme, working in conjunction with other Digital Place projects across the Council.

2.6.3 CITY-WIDE WAYLEAVE AGREEMENT

The Council continues to work with providers to provide access to gigabit capable services to council homes as part of the City-wide Wayleave Agreement. So far, 65% of council homes now have access to gigabit capable services, and 17% of council homes now having a choice of operators and competitive marketplace. Plans are well progressed for further infrastructure work, and we are on track to secure access for 80% of council homes by March 2021.

Over the last quarter resident interest and concerns around broadband operator's work in the borough has increased as resident's have started to see the reality of multiple operators installing their infrastructure on their blocks and as programmes of works have reached more of the Council's heritage stock. These concerns have been heightened by differences in technology and hence the aesthetic impact of each operator's infrastructure. To address this, we have made a number of improvements to the communications process around broadband operator activity in the borough and our processes, such as offering an introduction for Resident's Associations, Resident's Voice Groups, Tenant Management Organisations and Sheltered and Supported Scheme Managers to meet the operator to discuss the proposed work, as well as the operator's draft plans for comment and give representatives the option of attending our site visit with the operator to review the proposed plans.

2.6.4 DIGITAL STREET MARKETS

The Digital Street Markets project is nearing the delivery stage now, with all preparation nearly complete. As a reminder, the project will deliver the following over the next 2-and-a-half-year period:

- 9 Digital and Business Support Training Courses;
- 6 Digital Skills Workshops; and
- WiFi networks deployed to each of the street markets managed by Westminster City Council.

2.6.5 5G SMALL-CELL PROJECT

Ontix, Westminster's Small Cell Concessionaire, started deployment of Fixed Wireless Access on Westminster City Council lamp columns in January 2020. The solution mounts equipment on a lamp post and the customers' premises and delivers gigabit capable services in an area that historically could not receive superfast broadband. This approach has the benefits of reduced street works as the fibre dig is reduced to between the point of presence and the lamp post. This is an approach that they are seeking to use in much of Westminster's hard to reach areas.

Ontix has been working with multiple customers to deliver infrastructure and connectivity as a "neutral host". The concession has incentivised investment in networks, systems and processes which promote efficiency and which would not have happened otherwise.

The small Cells are currently all 4G, as the equipment manufacturers have not yet produced a 5G small cell that can be deployed on street furniture. The multi-national organisations recognise that 4G will service most of their customers for several years to come, but as there is still no 5G iPhone, they will use them to densify their 4G networks.

Currently, Ontix have indicated a total of 137 sites have been surveyed. A total of 16 Wi-Fi sites and 9 small cell sites are live, with another 49 small cell sites built but not live yet.