



City of Westminster

Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Report Of: Councillor Heather Acton

Portfolio: Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 As the new Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration, my portfolio includes responsibility for the following areas:
- Regeneration and affordable housing
 - Community protection services and Police Liaison
 - Voluntary and community sector including inclusion and Westminster Connects
 - Community engagement and inclusion
 - Air Quality
 - Rough sleeping (street-based services)

2 Regeneration, affordable housing and engagement

Affordable Housing

- 2.1 The programme, working well from early design through to construction, sales and completion remains on track to meet the Council's 1,850 affordable housing target by 2023.

Church Street

- 2.2 Through the Site A, B & C pre-app consultation the Church Street team will ask the community for feedback about the designs for these three sites. The first consultation phase is planned to run for four weeks from late February, with the second stage following in summer 2021.
- 2.3 Current focus for the Church Street Retail, Business and Market team includes completing the Curation Strategy report, formulated to help transform Church Street into a destination with improved retail, market and evening economy.
- 2.4 A community project, 'Create Church Street' was launched which promotes local involvement in the creative arts. The team has also developed a youth strategy and is in the process of agreeing a youth group ambassador to lead this.
- 2.5 Construction of the Green Spine began in early January, which is the first step in the creation of more green space and park space in a dense urban area. Approximately 50 new trees should help improve

air quality, and planting has been selected to increase biodiversity. The new open spaces will mean people of all ages can meet, exercise, and play

- 2.6** During the third lockdown, the Church Street Regeneration Base is operating on an appointments only basis, to protect the health of staff and the community. All stakeholder and resident meetings are taking place online. Community members can make an appointment to speak to a team member, and can reach us via phone and email. We are still delivering the programme newsletter throughout the ward, and more targeted construction project newsletters too. We also continue to work with Public Health to support their important campaigns.

Ebury Bridge

- 2.7** Towards the end of 2020, the new Ebury Edge Meanwhile building was opened. The project has affordable workspace, community facilities and retail opportunities for start-up businesses and community groups. The scheme forms part of our commitment to invest in both the Ebury community and the local economy as redevelopment work progresses. From 140 applications 18 new businesses have taken up space at the Edge. A Social Enterprise Café, Fat Macy's, also opened their doors for takeaway meals on 12th January. An Early Years childcare provider is also now using the new community space.
- 2.8** Held in the external courtyard area at Ebury Edge, in December there was a festive celebration for Ebury Bridge residents. Sponsored by our contractors, the event was a 'thank-you' to estate residents for their patience and understanding during a challenging year. In total, over 160 residents enjoyed street food, served at a social distance.
- 2.9** Following the successful re-housing of more than 100 households in Phase 1 of the Ebury renewal scheme, the team has commenced engagement with residents living in Phase 2A. Existing homes in latter development phases are being prepared for families wishing to stay on the estate while their new home is being built.
- 2.10** The work to prepare the estate for the delivery of the new homes has included the removal of empty blocks and the start of groundworks which will enable contractors to begin building the new homes, following the determination of the current Ebury planning application.

Harrow Road

- 2.11** Our contractor Wilmot Dixon has started on site to prepare the ground for the development of 112 new homes, affordable workspace, replacement nursery and community centre and green space improvements at 300 Harrow Road. The existing LEYF nursery has been provided with a temporary site that has been built on Westbourne Green. As part of the social value offer, Wilmot Dixon provided food hampers to all of the families at the nursery for the festive period. They are now starting outreach work with schools.
- 2.12** Work has also been underway at 470 Harrow Road where we are constructing a Business School in an empty unit to support new businesses to start up. Work has taken place with existing businesses around Maida Hill Market as part of the revitalisation of the market area and curation of the street market at that site.

Regeneration Development Programme updates

- 2.13** All other programmes within the regeneration development programme are progressing well.

Westminster Builds

- 2.14** Westminster Builds was established in December 2017, following an independent option appraisal of the tools available to the Council that were most suited to delivering more affordable

housing for those wishing to live or work in Westminster. Only a housing company can legally hold affordable housing, neither the General Fund nor the HRA can do this.

- 2.15** The company's business plan sets out the way that Westminster Builds will deliver the objectives set for it by the Council. Each project is developed and approved through the Council's internal governance procedure. Westminster Builds is subject to scrutiny through the Council's Internal Audit function and all development schemes have full Council approval, use council staff and Council processes including Public sector procurement.

3 Communities

Westminster Connects

- 3.1** Since the start of the pandemic, Westminster Connects has provided support for vulnerable and sheltered residents across the borough, connecting them and their needs to the huge pool of volunteers.
- 3.2** Since October, the regular support to the shielding and vulnerable residents has been through a helpline, monthly automated calls to the shielding and vulnerable older housing tenants, support and referrals for food, shopping and wellbeing, and connections with volunteers for practical support.
- 3.3** The focus since November has been support for residents through a hardship fund, shielding calls and volunteers. Our programme continues to work closely with VCS organisations to address food need (foodbanks and community food initiative); wellbeing calls and mentoring for young people.
- 3.4** We have also offered a local track and trace service in order to contact residents who have tested positive but whom the national service have been unable to trace.
- 3.5** Both services will remain in place until the end of March 2021 and will be regularly reviewed in light of changing community need. The services are staffed by a team which has been redeployed from across the council. Outcomes to support residents during this period include:
- During the three week November lockdown, we provided support to 5.5% of the shielding, compared to a national average of 0.89%
 - Shielding provided with basic support: 972
 - Shielding supported with shopping referrals: 830
 - Referrals to foodbanks: 1752, average of 146 a week
 - Referrals for hardship support: 378
 - £252,000 has been distributed to 378 households and to support with food needs. A contingency budget of £32,000 is remaining and to be used for residents with severe hardship.
 - Track and Trace: (started November 18, 2020)- Numbers of local residents contacted and supported to self-isolate: 437
- 3.6** In the past 3 months, we have continued strong working relationships with local voluntary and community sector partners, through our Community Intelligence Forum and Food Network, supporting the development of new forms of community food support.

Volunteers and Community Projects facilitated by Westminster Connects

- 3.7** Over the last period, Westminster Connects promoted 51 volunteering opportunities and deployed 540 volunteers. This includes supporting foodbanks, homeless hostels, community

centres, befriending services, shopping services, employment and adult education services and museums.

- 3.8** As at the end of December Westminster Connects had also signed up 30 volunteers as employment mentors, helping unemployed residents through our Westminster Employment Service.

4 Public Protection

Private Rented Sector (PRS) Strategy

- 4.1** Westminster has the largest PRS in the country. We have worked alongside internal and external partners on a new strategy to ensure the proper management and regulation of this sector. The aim of the strategy is to safeguard vulnerable tenants, while also providing much needed advice and support to landlords and agents.
- 4.2** One key proposal included in the strategy is the introduction of an Additional Licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation to allow a more effective, targeted focus on properties most in need of improvement. The strategy also commits to increasing intelligence within the sector, building relationships and sharing information with both landlords and tenants, and also working more closely with key internal and external partners to ensure satisfactory standards are maintained within PRS properties.
- 4.3** The consultation has now concluded, and the final strategy will be published shortly.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy

- 4.4** A new Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy is being worked on to address and combat anti-social behaviour across the borough.
- 4.5** There has been an increase in anti-social behaviour cases within residential environments, including neighbour disputes, verbal abuse, noise nuisance and unlicensed music events. This can be ascribed mainly to the situation with London moving into Tier 4 and then further lockdown.
- 4.6** Many of the increases are due by persons reporting non-compliance with COVID regulations, such as social distancing. Along with the police, the council's City Inspectors have been acting as COVID Marshalls, speaking to members of the public and, where appropriate, calling in the police to deal with significant non-compliance. The officers concentrate on hot-spot areas during at peak times.
- 4.7** Additional resources have been brought in for a short period to help manage this increased demand and new ASB caseworkers have been recruited.

Serious Youth Violence and the IGXU

- 4.8** The Serious Youth Violence Reduction Board was held on 18 January 2020 and updates given as to the levels of youth violence and actions taken. Levels of violence have been lower as a result of lockdown measures, but outreach from the IGXU and youth providers is also hampered, and so the situation is being monitored carefully, and support given to the greatest extent possible. Links have been made with some of the community activities in the regeneration projects – such as Westminster Wheels in Church Street, and Ebury Edge in the south.

Waste Enforcement

- 4.9** Waste enforcement since March has been affected by COVID-19. With the closure of commercial premises there was a reduction in waste being left on the public highway. City Inspectors were redeployed during this period to assist in the Council's response.
- 4.10** A new Waste Enforcement Policy was approved in July, which included a review of our Enforcement approach. City Inspectors have received training on the new process and the street digital platform. As a result of the impact of Covid-19 and redeployment of some IT colleagues the full implementation of the digital platform has been delayed until the beginning of February.

Partnership working with Police

- 4.11** The council continues to work in close partnership with the police across a range of enforcement and community-based areas. One area of business which has been particularly successful is the joint approach taken by the police and council in dealing with Unlicensed Music Events (UMEs), in both dealing with the events as they happen or through subsequent enforcement against organisers, lease holders or owner/occupiers. The partnership was successful recently in applying for a closure order based upon infringement of the COVID regulations. This was the first such successful case nationally.
- 4.12** With London entering Tier 4 and then a further national Lockdown, the council and police are working closely to deal with other COVID regulation infringements such as social distancing, the wearing of masks and shops flouting non-essential sales requirements. Joint partnership work dealing with ASB and crime continues, unaffected by the national lockdown.

5 On-Street Rough Sleeping

Rough Sleeping Strategy

- 5.1** Building on the elements in our existing Rough Sleeping Strategy, Westminster City Council has a comprehensive review of our operational rough sleeping work underway which encompasses commissioning, challenging existing models, forming new strategic partnerships and integrating this within with the wider work of the council. The rough sleeping team now operates within the housing service and forms part of the Housing Needs, Support and Safety division. Therefore, the strategy sits under both the Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration (on-street rough sleeping) and the Cabinet Member for Housing (indoor rough sleeping and homelessness).
- 5.2** The service recognises the need to innovate and change operating models to reflect the new demographics teams are seeing on the ground, but also changing direction so that we can work towards a new vision for ways of working, some of which has transpired through the experience of COVID-19. Individuals now being supported on the street are increasingly complex with behavioural issues and with entrenched addiction and offending issues. However, we do believe that by taking more of a housing-led approach, we can support these individuals more effectively so as to reduce the risk of them becoming more entrenched in the street population.
- 5.3** While the numbers are challenging, we feel that by trying new ways of working and reflecting the collaboration across the council, we can reshape our offer with more routes away from the streets, based on joint single assessments and an improved throughput. This work has started with the following programmes as demonstrated below.

Protect and Next Steps Accommodation Programmes

- 5.4** The Protect Programme launched in November and funded by MHCLG supports the efforts of our work to provide accommodation for rough sleepers during COVID-19. This programme will help with additional support where it is needed most during the restrictions and throughout winter and also to protect some of the most vulnerable rough sleepers in our communities from COVID-19.
- 5.5** Through £996k of Protect Programme funding we are mobilising a further 119 bed spaces to support those at risk of both Covid-19 and the cold weather. Within the Protect Programme we will also provide emergency accommodation during periods of extreme cold weather; already we have accommodated an additional 90 people, under the 'Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)' and will secure sustainable move-on accommodation for many of these clients to prevent the need for them to return to the streets. Our outreach services continue to work with individuals, who are not easy to house, or have been challenging or not sustained their accommodation, with provision in the Protect Programme.
- 5.6** The flow of new rough sleepers to Westminster has not abated since our last street count of 242. In November 75 new rough sleepers have been recorded, and we know the importance of responding rapidly to the needs of those new to rough sleeping. We secured funding for additional outreach workers as part of the Rough Sleeping Initiative Year 3 to form an Assessment and Triage team who focus on rapid assessments for everyone, and they are accommodated in short term accommodation before realising a move-on solution.
- 5.7** In addition to our Protect Programme, Westminster secured £2.38m through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme from MHCLG in September. A further 153 individuals have been referred into a holistic range of services that provide accommodation to meet the need of the individual.
- 5.8** Westminster continues with a wide range of work with its partners to support rough sleepers off the streets and this will continue and meet the requirement to make thorough assessments and offers for current rough sleepers.
- 5.9** Outreach services also utilise bed spaces for newer rough sleepers through GLA provision at No Second Night Out and the GLA's Chorus hotel, as well as a multi-borough service hosted by the North London Housing Partnership.