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Portfolio: Business, Licensing and Planning

The Report Of: Councillor Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning

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1 City for All – Business, Licensing and Planning Priorities

Thriving Economy

West End Recovery- West End Pop-up Project

- 1.1 The Activation plan has been discussed with local Business Improvement District (BID) representatives to align pop-up ventures with key events taking place within BID areas from May-September. The online application process to apply for a pop-up space opened on 25 March 2021, with opportunities for pop-up occupiers to apply for grants up to £5,000 for projects within the spaces, that will have public and audience engagement outcomes.
- 1.2 Good progress has been made to secure pop-up occupiers for void premises. Initial discussions have been held with organisations whose core purpose is discovering and curating creative talent. The aim of this project is to activate in line with the profile of each local area and enhance streetscape experience.

West End Recovery- Westminster Investment Service

- 1.3 The borough-wide draft Westminster Investment Service plan is in its latter stages. Bilateral conversations between London and Partners (L&P) and WCC with service areas as part of the concierge service have been completed by working on 'virtual case studies.' Companies have been identified for the Westminster 100 strategic company engagement programme.

West End Recovery- Westminster Animation Strategy

- 1.4 Work is progressing well on an animation strategy to support the recovery of the West End, working alongside external stakeholders to curate a programme of temporary, cultural and artistic interventions to animate the local area. An 'Animation Strategy Roundtable' is being held with BIDs and Landowners in late April to further engage local partners.

West End Recovery- Future Occupiers

- 1.5 The main piece of lead generation work has been commissioned. The thematic areas have been identified as key emerging growth areas for the West End with high growth potential and agile companies looking to scale rapidly. Following approval from WCC's Capital Review Group, a maximum grant of £300k has been confirmed to support the L&P West End Incubator to provide £5k 'fit out' grants for 60 new occupiers, managed by L&P and released when matched against property owners' commitment to the programme as a 'pay-to-play' element.

AI fresco hospitality

- 1.6 AI fresco hospitality reopened on 12 April 2021. As of publication, 300 pavement licences have been granted to restaurants to allow them to provide outdoor food and beverage service until 30 September 2021.

Kickstart

- 1.7 There has been considerable interest within the Council and local employers in our Kickstart programme following a promotion event held on 30 March 2021. 44 vacancies for the programme went live on 15 March. We are working with Jobcentre and local employment services to maximise applications from Westminster residents for roles, however vacancies are also open to people outside the borough.

Westminster Wheels

- 1.8 The Westminster Wheels workshop and shop site on Church Street is now open. We continue to get a steady flow of bike donations from local partners, including from the Metropolitan Police Service. To date, we have donated 35 bikes to 9 community groups, including Single Homeless Project and the Council's Early Help Team, and we are fulfilling donations requests for a further 96 bikes to 12 groups more groups that support Westminster residents and low income families, such as Cardinal Hulme Centre and Turning Point.

Vibrant Communities

Street Entertainment

- 1.9 The Busking and Street Entertainment Policy went live on 5 April 2021.

Gambling Licensing Policy

- 1.10 Work has commenced on reviewing Westminster's Gambling Licensing Policy. The early stages will include evidence gathering and review. Initial issues that have been highlighted are the need to protect vulnerable people and making it easier for residents to more robustly take part the application process. This internal policy review will complement Central Government's own review of Gambling Act 2005; the Council submitted its response to the consultation of this review, which closed on 31 March.

City Plan

- 1.11 On 19 March 2021, the Planning Inspectors shared their report declaring that the Westminster City Plan 2019-2040 is sound with the agreed modifications. The City Plan will be debated at Full Council on 21 April. If the Plan is adopted at Full Council, it can then start to form the basis for planning decisions.

Planning Engagement

- 1.12 A draft 'Early Community Engagement Guidance' for developers was consulted upon with resident groups and developer representatives in March 2021. The informal guidance promotes the use of digital engagement methods in combination with traditional engagement methods and encourages more transparency in engagement with communities on development proposals. A finalised version of the guidance is expected to be published in June, subject to further consultation.

Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES)

- 1.13 WAES' Community Learning tutors have been supporting the effort to combat vaccine hesitancy and improve vaccination take up through ESOL classes. To support economic recovery and provide additional training opportunities for learners, WAES have submitted a bid of £2.1m over two years and another as subcontractor of a partnership bid (£300k over two years) for the GLA Good Work for All Fund. The programmes will cover areas such as digital creative careers in VFX, web design, health and social care and enterprise opportunities.
- 1.14 The WAES accommodation feasibility study is progressing well and a wide range of stakeholders have been involved in discussions with the consultants. The study is scheduled for completion at the end of May 2021 and will alongside the outcomes from the review of the Lisson Grove Programme, provide the education case for WAES future accommodation.

Smart City

Digital Planning Tools

- 1.15 A digital strategy for Place Shaping and Town Planning is currently in development to ensure appropriate digital tools are identified, prioritised and implemented to ensure an easier service for residents and service users to interact with and make planning applications simpler.

2 Cabinet Member Key Decisions

2.1 Since the last Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee, I have formally approved the following key decisions:

- Adoption of the Westminster City Plan 2019 - 2040 and Policies Map Cabinet Member Report