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Report Of: Councillor Heather Acton

Portfolio: Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration

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1. City for All – Communities and Regeneration Priorities

1.1 Vibrant Communities

1.1.1 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy

We are in the early stages of developing a new ASB strategy that will set out how we are continuing to work towards reducing the number of incidents, the impact of ASB, and to ensure that victims and perpetrators receive support and justice relevant to their needs and circumstances. Following this an inclusive stakeholder engagement plan will be developed, so that further insights and views to support the Council in developing the strategy and action plan can be considered. A formal consultation will be held on the draft strategy and it is anticipated a launch will be Summer 2022.

1.1.2 Westminster Connects

Westminster Connects ended the pandemic response team in May and is now focusing on volunteers and volunteering. Work is underway to increase the range of volunteering options, and to engage actively with residents who are involved in volunteering. Two community pantries have opened, one in the north and one in the south of the City. A review of core voluntary sector contracts is underway, with stakeholder engagement and surveys of community organisations and volunteers. This review will shape future contracts to support the voluntary sector and volunteering.

1.1.3 Rough Sleeping Commissioning Strategy

The Council continues to assess the longer-term impact of accommodating people previously sleeping on our streets and people at risk of sleeping rough during the pandemic. Current provision must be retained, while future options are developed for post-pandemic services. A commissioning working group is being set up in June 2021 to support the Divisional Head of Housing Needs, Support and Safety. This will develop a Commissioning Strategy and review future options for service commissioning. Officers from across the Council and procurement business partners will form part of this group. The scoping of this work will start in July 2021.

1.1.4 Church Street

Stage Two of the pre-planning consultation for Church Street Site A is planned to open on 30 June 2021. In addition to the phone calling that generated a high response in Stage One (which took place in March 2021) we will carry out some face-to-face activity in the form of ‘pop-up’ market stalls.

Venture 382 is now home to Interim Workspace on a “meanwhile use” let. They have subdivided the space in to two wings. The West Wing is now home to six artist studios with eight members and a total workforce of around fourteen members of staff and volunteers. The creative studios are truly affordable being licensed to occupiers at £1 per square foot per month. The studios have yet to launch officially but are fully let with 50% occupancy by Westminster residents.

1.1.5 Ebury

The Council achieved approval for the Ebury Bridge Estate hybrid planning application. Construction on the detailed part of the approval (Phase 1) is expected to start on site this autumn, building the first 226 new homes across two blocks. In order to facilitate this work, the current Children’s playground will be relocated to the sports pitch, which will allow for both temporary play and ball games until the construction of the first new public square due to be conducted as part of Phase 1, expected to complete in Spring 2024.

Businesses at Ebury Edge have reopened following the lifting of non-essential retail lockdown on 12 April 2021. To date, 18 start-up businesses have taken up occupation in the new units on Ebury Bridge Road. Existing Ebury Bridge Estate residents are being invited to come forward with their own business ideas, with the opportunity to work with the Ebury

Regeneration Team and Westminster's Business Support Team to test their idea formally at Ebury Edge. A formal launch event of Ebury Edge is being planned for August 2021 subject to Government restrictions.

1.1.6 Balmoral/ Darwin House Redevelopment

The Council has recently achieved planning permission for its proposals to build 52 affordable homes on the site of a former pub, garage site and through the redevelopment of Darwin House. A new Community Supportive Block, built to HAPPI (Housing for Aging Population Panel for Innovation) standards, will be delivered as a first phase. This will enable the residents of Darwin House to move into significantly improved accommodation, while staying together as a community. The new homes will help our older residents to age well through the provision of homes twice the size than currently occupied, with more flexible living space for a carer or family member to stay over and benefit from dementia friendly design.

18 new intermediate homes will be built in a second phase. These 1 bed homes will be prioritised for local residents and are targeted at households with incomes of between £32,000 and £60,000. The homes are aimed at those who do not qualify for social housing but are priced out of the private rental market. All homes will be owned and retained by the Council.

1.1.7 Harrow Road

The site at 300 Harrow Road has been granted planning permission and the children at the Harrow Road Nursery have been relocated to a new cabin on Westbourne Green. Hoardings are up and the construction contractor has demolished the former buildings and is working to clear the ground.

1.2 Cleaner and Greener

1.2.1 Code of Construction Practice (CoCP)

The CoCP has been drafted and will be discussed at an upcoming Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy and Scrutiny committee. There will be a six-week public consultation period, in order to consult with the developer community and other stakeholders to ensure their input is fully integrated into the plan. The CoCP allows us to work closely with large development sites and monitor their day-to-day activities, including noise, dust and vibration but it also enables the Council to influence the hours of work, waste and vehicle movements to and from the site. The process also gives guidance to developers in a way which enables us to recover our costs.

1.2.2 Air Quality Action Plan

We are revising some of the actions in the Air Quality Action Plan to reflect the impact of the pandemic. Cross-portfolio discussions will take place to ensure that the plan reflects the full range of steps that can be taken by the Council, including public health measures.

1.2.3 Westminster Schools Air Quality Programme

The Council's Schools Clean Air Programme has provided every school with the opportunity for a bespoke Air Quality Audit which recommends measures which will help to mitigate the impact of poor air quality for students and staff at the school. This programme has been supported by environmental consultants WSP who carried out the audits and collated the results. All the schools that participated have now received their audit reports. WSP have collated the findings and the final report and the next steps of the programme will be finalised shortly.

2. Major Decisions

Since my last report to Committee, I have formally approved the following decisions:

- Approval of Expenditure from the Ward Budget of Marylebone High Street
- Approval of Expenditure from the Ward Budget of Maida Vale
- Approval of Expenditure from the Ward Budget of Warwick Ward
- Approval of Extension of Borough-wide Street Drinking and Dog Control Public Space Protection Orders

3. Areas of Focus

3.1 Serious Youth Violence and Gang Activity

The Council and Metropolitan Police Service continue to work closely in preparing for the lifting of COVID-19 lockdown conditions in order to prepare for any potential increase in gang offending. A high visibility policing plan has been put in place, with both BCU and centrally deployed police resources in areas of high risk.

Work has commenced between Westminster City Council and London Borough of Brent officers and police to ensure maximisation of cooperation required to deal with any cross-border gang issues. Employment coaches attached to the

Integrated Gangs & Exploitation Unit (IGXU) have supported 7 young people into work at Westminster Wheels, and several are being supported into KickStart roles including within the council. Whilst the borough has seen a slight increase in gang-related offending since lockdown was eased, Westminster has not seen anywhere near the number of offences experienced pre-pandemic.

3.2 Modern Slavery

The bi-borough Ending Modern Slavery and Exploitation strategy is due to be launched at the end of June 2021. The new 5-year strategy details the incidence of Modern Slavery that has been found within Westminster and contains a Coordinated Community Response required to eradicate this often hidden and serious crime. The voice of the victim is central to our approach.

3.3 Rough Sleeping

The last street count took place on 27 May and 167 rough sleepers were accounted. This was an increase of 61 people (57%). We consider there was a significant increase in European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and Roma cohorts on the streets since the March 2021 count due to the relaxing of lockdown measures, and the refusal of offers of accommodation and placements from the Council, and rejection of offers of move-on pathways from the Greater London Assembly and Glasdoor.

The Council has now received confirmation on our allocation of Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) 4 funding for 2021/22 from MHCLG which is £5,299,469 and an increase of £1,074,349 of funding allocated in 2020/21. The mobilisation of this funding during June and July will allow the rough sleeping team to increase our focus on the areas of substance and alcohol dependency and the work with specialist partners in these fields.

3.4 Infill Sites – Regeneration

The programme is entering a busy construction period, with multiple sites seeing main construction works underway or shortly commencing works on site. These schemes will provide 100 affordable homes, making a significant contribution to the Council's affordable delivery pipeline. Schemes of note include Queens Park Court (23 homes), Torridon House (21 homes) and Adpar St car park (20 Community Supportive Homes). It is recognised that construction can be disruptive for residents. Our construction partners are tasked with minimising disruption impacts wherever possible and undertake work in line with Covid 19 Government guidance and advice from the Construction Leadership Council. The Infill programme is seeking further new opportunities to provide affordable homes.

3.5 Smogmobile – Clean Air Day

On June 16th we hosted an air quality action day on the Strand and Regent Street with a special visit from the 'Smogmobile', an electric van fitted with monitoring equipment to track air pollution, providing real time measurements of nitrogen dioxide emissions. This event was well received and showcased our commitment to improve air quality for our communities, as well as reducing carbon emissions to meet the UK's national climate targets.

3.6 COVID-19 Safety During European Football Championship

City Inspectors will visit licensed premises to ensure businesses are operating in compliance with coronavirus regulations and licence conditions. There will be a Euro 2020 'Fanzone' in Trafalgar Square for the duration of the tournament, showing 7-9 matches in total. The first two matches (13th and 18th June) to be shown at the fan zone are ticketed events with limited capacity due to COVID restrictions and tickets were made available to frontline workers via a ballot.

3.7 Hospitality Licensing

City Inspectors have worked throughout the reopening through Step 2 on April 12, Step 3 on May 17 and building towards the now delayed Step 4 on 19 July. Although shops and hospitality venues have reopened throughout the City, the focus from 12 April has been West End ward, and in particular Soho, where the highest concentration of licensed premises is located, and where the al fresco outdoor hospitality scheme has had the biggest impact.

Generally, premises have reopened safely and in a Covid secure manner, however enforcement action has been taken where compliance issues were not resolved or deemed serious enough to issue fines. In total, 10 fixed penalty notices for £1000 each have been served since April 12, a further 3 prohibition notices have been served, and 2 pavement licences have been revoked.

3.8 Busking Updates

Following the launch of the Busking and Street Entertainment Policy, to enable engagement with performers in the regulated area, we have deployed a dedicated team of City Inspectors working 7 days a week from 12:00 – 22:00. Since the policy came into force, we have received 120 complaints and recorded 89 proactive engagements, resulting in 7 verbal warnings and 2 remedial letters. Apart from Covent Garden, we have seen a high level of compliance with the policy with most performers applying for a licence after engagement with our officers or not returning. Around 90 licences have been issued already. A Street Entertainment Forum is due to be held soon.

3.9 Europeans Living in Westminster

We welcome all EU citizens who have chosen to live and work in Westminster. On May 19th I sent a letter reminding residents to apply to the EU settlement scheme before the June 30th deadline set by Central Government. We have teamed up with Citizens Advice Westminster to assist those who need support in completing their application and provided links to access this advice in multiple languages. We have had some appreciative responses, which have led to some becoming volunteers with Westminster Connects.

3.10 Updates the Shisha Local Authority Working Group

On Wednesday 9th June Westminster hosted a meeting of the Shisha Local Authority Working Group. We had over a dozen authorities represented as well as Imperial College London and the LGA. It was a productive and positive meeting. Our fellow authorities are engaged in wanting to address issues and there was some detailed discussion. As a group we agreed to collaborate on the following work streams: refreshing the evidence base on a national scale, developing best practice guidance for managing/enforcing against shisha premises, and drafting a number of potential legislative amendments.