



City of Westminster

**Finance, Planning and  
Economic Development  
Policy and Scrutiny  
Committee**

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<b>Portfolio:</b>	Finance and Council Reform
<b>The Report of:</b>	Councillor David Boothroyd
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## 1. Priorities of the Administration

The report sets out some of the key priorities of the administration and the achievements to date within the Finance and Resources Directorate by service area.

### Finance Department Priorities

Key priorities the Finance Department are working with the administration on include:

- Working to deliver cost effective services through Westminster to all residents throughout the 2022/23 financial year, supported by rigorous financial management.
- Developing a 2023/24 balanced budget for Westminster which reflects the new Administration's priorities.
- Further develop the Medium-Term Financial Plan to align with manifesto plans and horizon scanning information where adequate information is available.
- Examine ways to improve the call centre system and online reporting services.
- Improve the Council's website to further develop accessibility functionality.
- As part of reviewing WCC's Pension fund's responsible investment strategy, officers have been working on environmental, social, and governance factors for the pension fund governance and have also applied for Stewardship Code status with the financial reporting council.
- The Council's pension fund supports housing and infrastructure development. The first tranches of social housing, renewable energy infrastructure and standard infrastructure have been invested in over the last two years, with further planned investigation for the agenda for the next twelve months.

- Refreshing the Council's Responsible Procurement and Commissioning Strategy to align with the new administration's priorities. This includes the launch of a Modern Slavery Statement and Supplier Charter, setting clear standards for organisations we would like to work with.
- A bank of supplier award criteria has been created showcasing contract specific approaches to CO2 reduction, air and noise pollution, minimising waste, and urban greening, as well as other commitments to test during tenders.
- Introducing the consideration of in-sourcing, from the beginning to potential procurement, for projects as part of the Procurement Gateway process.

### Sustainability

- Deliver sustainability and decarbonisation interventions across our offices, and operational buildings plus the wider Westminster community.
- Continue to apply for grant and other funding, to achieve funding for our sustainability ambitions.
- Delivery against the target making Westminster buildings carbon net-zero by 2030 which includes work on the second phase of our decarbonisation plan which will cover both operational and investment properties.
- Employment of a new Community Sustainability Officer to support community occupiers and their buildings with decarbonisation plans and a restructure of the wider Property team to bring more focused resources in this area more widely.

### Accessibility

- Following a successful bid of DLUHC, we received £150,000 for 3 new Changing Places Toilet provisions. Changing Places support people with severe disabilities and their carers who require specialist toilet and changing facilities. We are working to create and promote changing places across the city to assist visitors and residents.
- Further rollout of Touchdown spaces across the city in locations such as in libraries and housing offices so that staff can work across Westminster not just in main offices. These spaces are particularly useful for peripatetic workers and is supported by the ABLE network.
- Rollout of the WelcoMe app at more locations. This easy-to-use application is designed to enable and engage visitors to our buildings with additional needs to make them feel welcome and have an overall better experience tailored to them.

### Community Hubs

- Delivery of a Community Hub approach, initially at ex-Bayswater Children's Centre and as an inherent feature in the design of the new Seymour Centre.

### Temporary Accommodation

- Assessment of future schemes are looking at the viability for Temporary Accommodation at site.

## **2. Achievements**

### **Finance Department Achievements**

The Finance Department is working with all services to manage the approved 2022/23 budget and will look to update on further achievements throughout the year. To date the reported achievements, include:

- Closing of accounts for the 2021/22 financial year is underway, and due to meet statutory deadlines.
- The General Fund outturn position for 2021/22 was a net outturn of £2.0m, an overspend against an approved budget of £183m. This was a favourable position compared to earlier forecasts due to Covid specific grants.

### **Corporate Contact Centre**

Service transition of the corporate contact centre back in house to the council began in May 2022 and will continue in a phased approach until October 2022. This phased approach will ensure high performance and maintenance of service quality, whilst allowing the recruitment and training of the new in-house team.

The recruitment programme has focused on promoting opportunities to local people. In partnership with Westminster Employment Service a third of all posts in the new structure have been filled by Westminster residents.

In June 2022, an omni channel telephony solution has been procured to provide a platform for all customer contact including voice, email, web chat, SMS, and social media. The platform also allows customer journeys to be monitored and provides advanced speech analytics to gain valuable insights.

### **Website and online**

#### **Report-It**

Project established to redesign the report-it function to make it easier for residents to report issues and receive updates. This work includes:

- End-to-end user-centric service design across services and channels
- Discovery to understand user needs and pain points
- Technical implementation
- Exemplary project to establish blueprint for future service design and product delivery.

### **MyWestminster Digital Card**

The cabinet member has been given a briefing on the MyWestminster Digital Card, and has encouraged officers to continue to integrate more services, and smooth out the process of application.

## **Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 1**

The programme of energy conservation measures funded by the PSDS grant of £13m is drawing to a rapid conclusion, with final funded works being completed by 30th June 2022.

The funding has delivered carbon saving across a range of buildings including Council offices, leisure centres, libraries, schools, community centres and nurseries. We have installed a wide variety of energy conservation measures and here are just some of the outcomes of the programme:

- A projected underwritten reduction of up to 20% in the carbon emissions attributable to our corporate property buildings. This equates to a total annual CO2 energy saving of circa 1,700 tonnes.
- Investment of Air Source Heat Pump technology in 9 buildings, which will generate combined annual energy savings of up to 5m kWh and carbon emissions savings of 1,217 tonnes.
- A total of 1649 solar PV panels have been installed across 12 sites, providing annual electricity savings of 580,000 kWh and carbon emissions savings of 40 tonnes.
- LED lighting has been introduced at 63 buildings which will reduce carbon emissions by 77 tonnes.
- Pipework insulation has been undertaken at 27 buildings reducing carbon emissions by a further 107 tonnes.
- The combined impact of all measures will result in a £253k annual cost saving measured at 2020/21 prices (pre-energy price escalation levels).
- The benefits to the programme are wider than just the carbon savings; including improvements to immediate environment, job creation, added social value through apprenticeships and a range of learning experiences with school children at sites across Westminster. The standardisation of plant and fittings across the sites means easier and lower cost maintenance and improvements to the building environment for users and staff.

### **Grant Bids**

A grant application has been made for funding this month, from the Low Carbon Skills Fund, of BEIS/Salix Finance. This grant funding being the forerunner to Phase 3 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund, most likely to become available from Aug 2022.

### **Strategic Investment**

The re-structure of the head-lease arrangements at 90-104 Berwick Street completed on 16th May 2022 from which time the Council received all the rent

payable under the lease to Premier Inn. As well as a significant uplift in the value of the Council's freehold interest, the transaction doubles the net income it receives, providing additional financial support for frontline services.

### **Seymour Centre Development**

The Seymour Centre refurbishment has been on the council's agenda for very many years. The scheme's community hub approach embeds the multi-use of the building, incorporating Libraries and Registrars, whilst maintaining all current leisure provision.

At the time of coming into office, officers had prepared the next stage of public consultation in June and were planning to issue invitations to public meetings at Seymour Leisure Centre and Marylebone and Church Street Libraries. After reading the briefing to understand what work had been done, it was agreed to the consultation proceeding exactly as planned. The first face-to-face community consultation events occurred earlier this month alongside more online webinars and there was further detailed engagement with user groups, clubs and occupiers.

We also completed activity to engage early procurement of a main contractor for the scheme.

### **Procurement and Commercial Services**

Procurement and Commercial Services are continuing to engage large suppliers and SMEs, this time with a construction Supplier Engagement Event. The event connected SMEs, including minority owned organisations, with large Tier 1 construction contractors. The construction pipeline was showcased, and smaller organisations received tips on the bidding process.

Several meetings have been held with the procurement team, together with the Deputy Cabinet member for Procurement, to discuss how to move on revising the procurement code to promote insourcing and social value from contracts.

### **Performance monitoring**

Work has begun with the Strategy and Intelligence Team to devise a system of performance monitoring that measures the relevant data and developments to ensure all manifesto pledges are delivered.

### **Local Carbon Bonds**

While funding from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (through Salix Finance) has allowed solar panels to be added to several council buildings, the administration is committed to doing more, with the cost likely to exceed current resources within the Carbon Offset fund.

Accordingly, and together with the Deputy Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Biodiversity, several meetings have been held with the finance team relating to the pledge to issue a climate bond that funds work towards our Net Zero pledges.

### **Census**

The local authority population figures from the Census are due to be released on 28 June. The Census was taken in March 2021 when Westminster's population was strongly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Work has taken place in advance to arrange the City Council's response.

### **Nepali delegation**

The Cabinet Member was invited to give evidence on control of local and national government finance to a visiting delegation of members of the Nepal Parliamentary Finance Committee, arranged through the National Democratic Institute.

### **Decisions**

Since being appointed five formal decisions have been taken:

- Household Support Fund Extension: April – September 2022 - This decision sets in place the arrangements by which Westminster will distribute £1,951,507 Household Support Funding awarded to it. The largest two elements will fund school meals during holiday periods and older person households identified as having a low income. This decision was the first to be taken under the present administration.
- Council Tax Rebate scheme - to provide £150 Energy Support to eligible residents - This decision concerns additional funding for a discretionary scheme to help those not covered by payments automatically made to households in Bands A-D for Council Tax.
- 9 Woodfield Road London W9 2BA - This decision agrees a deed of variation to an agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The agreement is needed because the development will provide new depot for the street cleansing unit.
- Lease Renewal - Public Open Space at Kensal Wharf, opposite 598-606 Harrow Road, London W10 - It was agreed for the council to lease the small park next to Halfpenny Bridge on Harrow Road for 125 years, to secure this locally important but small area of public open space, and access to the footbridge.
- Writing off of irrecoverable debt (quarterly report) - Quarter 4 2021/22 - This is a regular decision to agree to the council ceasing to pursue some debts which would likely never be paid or where the cost of pursuing the debt now exceeds the likely return.