



City of Westminster

**Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration
Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

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Portfolio: Climate Action, Regeneration & Renters

The Report of: Councillor Matt Noble

Report Author and Contact Details: Alexandra Deolinda Severino
adseverino@westminster.gov.uk

The following report includes priorities and delivery progress to date of the new administration.

Climate Action

Tackling climate change is a key priority for this administration. Work is already underway to ensure that climate impacts are taken into account for all major decisions taken by Cabinet Members and as part of our sustainable procurement strategy.

To support this, from July the Climate Impact Evaluation Toolkit (CIET) will be introduced, allowing officers to assess on a consistent basis the carbon implications of their projects/proposals. The CIET will be incorporated into Finance Capital Bidding programme, with all capital bids requiring a carbon assessment to be submitted in order to be considered.

To support embedding of climate priorities internally, Carbon Literacy Training will continue to be rolled out to WCC staff with sessions planned for July and September. More than 101 Council staff have completed the training to date.

Also this month, in partnership with the Westminster Property Association, we are delivering a roundtable with key business stakeholders to help finalise the Sustainable City Charter and associated implementation framework. This will be a key tool in helping to drive sustainable building use across the city.

This work is part of a broader set of actions in the Climate Emergency Action Plan to address building emissions including establishing a retrofit task force, launching a retrofit show home and developing our advice offer on energy savings in the home.

We are also finalising a specification for a Local Area Energy Plan to assess our renewable and energy decarbonisation opportunities, which we are aiming to procure over the summer.

We are actively considering opportunities for mobilising funding to support our climate goals. This includes a community municipal investment product (also known as a local climate bond) to mobilise local investment in climate projects in Westminster.

The Bond will enable residents to support local climate action and receive a small interest payment in return. It is intended the investment will be offered using the investment partner, Abundance, on their platform. Abundance has carried out a number of successful investment launches for other Council's including Berkshire and the London Borough of Camden. Projects included are yet to be finalised but will need to credibly assist the Council's net zero ambitions to qualify.

Officers are currently carrying out due diligence on the investment paperwork with external legal services and hope to commit to a capital raising process of around £1m - £3m. This will be the launch in the next 12 months and involve signing a 'climate pledge', committing to the process. Councillors and officers will be promoting the idea to residents as part of the Community Climate Action Day on 16 July at Ebury Edge, Ebury Bridge Rd, and registering initial expressions of interest.

Regeneration

Delivering social housing and lower rent homes in Westminster is one of our top policy objectives. Building private housing should only be justified by the funds it raises to pay for more social and lower rent units.

Church Street

- All social rent tenants have been decanted from Site A. There are only 12 residential leaseholders (with 6 under negotiation) and 14 commercial tenants remaining.
- The Procurement Strategy for a Development partner to deliver the scheme on Site A through a Corporate Joint Venture was finalised with documents prepared to launch on the 16th May 2022 but this has subsequently been paused.
- The Green Spine Phase 1 construction is ongoing, from Bell Street to Samford Street and will create a new pedestrian-focused green route through the heart of the Church Street regeneration area. Works are focused on Broadley Street Gardens currently, linking up two parks to make one larger and more accessible open space.
- Phase 2 of the Green Spine (from the Carrick Yard development to the canal) is at Feasibility/Concept Design stage.

Ebury

- Hybrid planning consent was achieved in April 2022. 781 new, high quality mixed tenure homes, open space and community infrastructure. 50% affordable provision, mixed tenure cores with horizontal distribution.
- Demolition of Phase 1 site plus additional site enabling works has been successfully delivered by JF Hunt. 99% of demolition material treated and re-used on site avoiding landfill and vehicle impacts.
- Phase 1 delivery is underway and will deliver 226 new mixed tenure homes and first open public square and is due for completion in Summer 2024. This phase is a key milestone in meeting our Ebury re-housing commitments.
- The Compulsory Purchase Order for remaining phases commenced with hearing scheduled for August 2022.
- The scheme's viability for future phases is a real challenge given market pressures. Project levers include tenure mix, tenure distribution, programme and value engineering of the design.
- Ground source and air source heat pump strategy for heating and cooling delivers a sustainable solution on this major regeneration scheme with the new estate being 90% less carbon than the existing estate.

Developments

Luton Street: Construction is progressing well with completion forecast later this summer. The external works activity is very busy in the courtyard and on the green spine. Highways works are progressing well as per the construction programme.

Lisson Arches: Construction continues with completion now anticipated in December 2022. Brickwork has been completed all floors and lift installation is underway. Additional grant of £1.8M has been secured under the GLA's 'Care and Specialist Supported Housing' programme.

Ashbridge, Ashmill and Cosway: Construction continues with completion anticipated early 2023. The contractor is completing the external envelope and progressing with the internal fit out activities. The air source heat pump designs are reaching completion, for integration at Ashmill Street.

Balmoral/Darwin House: Enabling works in progress and main works contract negotiations and pricing well advanced. All Pre-Commencement Planning Conditions submitted for discharge.

Renters

We aim to do the most we can under the current government regulations to protect tenants in the private rented sector (PRS) while campaigning to do more.

The Private Sector Housing service within Public Protection & Licensing regulates Westminster's PRS. As well as delivering work around property licensing, the service also receives complaints concerning poor conditions in the residential sector.

Last year the service received over 1600 service requests, and the figure for 2022/23 stands at 233 in June 2022. Work has also been carried out to collect additional information on external wall systems amongst all high-rise residential buildings within Westminster for onward reporting to DLUHC, and to aid risk prioritisation moving forward. In delivering this work we are in close contact with key partners including central government, the LGA's Joint Inspection Team, London Fire Brigade and local authority colleagues across London to ensure relevant sharing of information and best practice.

A Fairer Private Rented Sector - White Paper

The White Paper, published on the 16th of June, sets out a 12-point plan for the Private Rented Sector (PRS), and the government's long-term vision for a PRS that is fit for delivering a better deal for tenants. There is no timetable for all the measures, although some will be subject to consultations and legislative change, so will take time and further detail will emerge.

The 12 points in summary:

- 1) A first time Decent Homes Standard (consultation to follow) and completion of the review of the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System in the Autumn
- 2) Pilot schemes with local authorities to explore ways of enforcing standards
- 3) Abolition of Section 21 (no fault evictions) taken forward through legislation. To achieve this a new periodic tenancy will be developed replacing other tenancy types. Six months' notice will be given for implementation
- 4) Reform of possession grounds, to strike a fair balance between landlords and tenants. This includes a new mandatory possession ground for serious rent arrears
- 5) Restriction of rent increases to once a year – taken forward through legislation

- 6) A mandatory single Ombudsman that landlords must join
- 7) Work to speed up court proceedings
- 8) Property portal for tenants, landlords and councils so everyone has all the relevant information
- 9) Strengthening of local authority powers to address criminal landlords – by strengthening fines etc.
- 10) Making it illegal for landlords / agents to have blanket bans on renting to families or those in receipt of benefits
- 11) Giving tenants the right to request to have a pet
- 12) Work with the industry to develop ways to passport deposits.

Next steps / implications

Officers are working with the PRS Strategy Group (which includes representatives from across the sector) to consider its implications. Initial analysis is:

- The plan aligns well with our Private Rented Sector Strategy.
- Evictions from the PRS is a leading cause of homelessness and the abolition of Section 21 should help to address this (although Local Housing Allowance rates not reflecting market rents is a big issue in Westminster and isn't addressed and affordability of the PRS will remain a core issue for low-income households).
- Our data confirms rising rents in Westminster and stakeholders have also reported they are seeing some rent increases which are excessive, so the forthcoming legislation should have an impact.
- Shortages of supply in the PRS are already being reported, with some speculation that landlords left the market during the pandemic. Some elements of the plan could deter new landlords i.e. 'accidental' ones from entering the market.