

Date:	18 October 2022
Portfolio:	Housing Services
The Report of:	Councillor Liza Begum
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1. Key decisions made in the preceding period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated 18

July:

- 27/07/2022 – Funding for Purchases Under the Right to Buy, Buy Back Programme
- 29/09/2022 - Housing Solutions Service Contract Extension
- 07/10/2022 – Social Housing Supply and Allocations 2022-23

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

Retrofitting Update

The Retrofit Show Home is being well received with over 80 visits from residents. Contractors and staff have also been visiting. This project shows the various retrofit works which can be done to reduce energy consumption in a typical pre 1900 mid terraced flat. Retrofit works take a fabric first approach with additional insulation to floors and internal walls, windows receive secondary glazing and doors are upgraded to high thermal efficiency. Other measures include active air circulation vents, bathroom warm water recovery, air source heat pump central heating.

Following an award by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) we have received £3.3m grant funding to retrofit 360 properties from EPC rating of Band E and D, to a B rating. The total number of properties which have had retrofit works carried out is now in excess of 120. This puts us in a good position to achieve our target of 360 by 31st March 2023, this is due to the resource gap being closed by hiring staff and understanding the supply chain / delivery method for achieving this process. BEIS will shortly be launching their criteria and inviting applications for Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding (SHDF) Wave 2 grant funding. We will be submitting a bid for further funding once advised of the criteria which is due at the end of 2022.

We have over 50 properties booked in for retrofitting during August, however, we are receiving around 50% refusal of works at survey stage, which we are working on by improving resident engagement and communications.

Major Works

Capital Programme is gathering momentum- with 18 projects in the South under *United Living* and 5 in the North with *Axis Europe*. We record that our assigned projects for this financial year represents a “back loaded “programme of work to give balance to current delivery model.

Axis Europe in the North of the City is gathering traction with our sustainability works with a view of commencing Warwick Low Rise in October to install PV Panels to the roof area. The Queens Park Estate is also going through sustainability proposals which will help us meet our sustainability objectives. There is a large programme of works at Avenue Gardens where we have two Service Providers (*United Living & Gem*) working in tandem providing much needed refurbishment and mechanical & engineering works to the estate.

Repairs

Repair numbers are steady with the service receiving 5,500 repair requests each month and our first-time fix rate is 87.5% which in turn is reducing the number of follow-on jobs. Compliance for gas continues to be excellent **99.1%** with accelerated Out of hours testing being introduced and weekend working to provide additional support.

Morgan Sindall is recruiting 8 additional plumbers for the winter period, and we are continuing to monitor demand against performance to ensure we have the correct number of operatives. 6 new apprentices have been appointed to the Repairs Team with 6 more contracts available and undergoing active recruitment.

Mould and damp pilots are commencing in Queens Park Court, Mozart & Lisson Green in September 2022 and ward Councillor updates will be issued with details of monitoring devices in homes to read moisture levels in homes and provide alerts prior to issues occurring. Our first phase of the Communal Works Programme will start in 13 Herries Street, 17 Severn Avenue and Danby House with the remaining properties on Mozart to be programmed in. We also have a £1m programme focusing on communal repairs. This will include spend on estates and action plans agreed with residents on Community Thursdays across.

Anti-Social Behaviour Update

There are currently 181 open Housing ASB cases. The highest concentration of cases is the Mozart, Lydford and Avenue Gardens area with 31 cases. As a further breakdown 51 are related to noise issues and are related to verbal abuse, harassment, and threatening behaviour. Please see below a table of ASB actions taken by the Housing ASB team this year to date.

Action	Number	Notes
Notice of Seeking Possession (NOSP) served	14	Legal notice served for breach of tenancy
Possession orders	5 gained 1 Adjournment	1 x Suspended Possession Order 4 x Mandatory Possession Orders 1 Adjournment for 12 months
Closure orders	1	

Injunctions	8 Injunctions applications heard at court	5 injunctions granted, 1 dismissed, 2 adjourned
Awaiting hearings	4	1 x Possession 3 x Injunction

Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

The Council has committed to develop its first Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB Strategy). The aims of the strategy are to collate and promote all that we and our partners do in a single space, provide a clear position statement on ASB and how it is governed/managed, provide an opportunity for us to review all our evidence, take a fresh look at our challenges and overlaying this with the latest innovation and best practice nationally/internationally, make clear what our key priorities are and how we will tackle them, create a formalised action plan for improvements and a commitment to keeping this under review.

Officers have taken an evidence-led approach to the development of the Strategy, looking at the National, Regional and Local picture and trends. Officers identified the following key objectives to help provide a framework for the strategy: prevention, early intervention, victim support, bringing perpetrators to justice, and community engagement. Officers have begun extensively engaging various groups including, residents, the police, victims and perpetrators and will continue to do so into the fall. A comprehensive update is due to come to this Committee in early 2023 when the strategy is further in development.

Pimlico Heating District Undertaking (PDHU) Update

Summer works and servicing on the PDHU nearing completion and the boiler fuel replacement scheme is commencing which will complete whilst the system is operational. Following burst pipes on Lillington and Longmoore in December 2021, Ward Councillor updates and Section 20 notice being prepared. Separation works will commence on the network in Morgan House to allow the team to control pressure on the estate and in turn reduce bursts. In October a separate report will be presented to this Committee on PDHU.

Fire and Building Safety Bill Update

There is currently no new update regarding the Fire Safety Act 2021 or the Building Safety Act 2022. Officers are preparing a strategy to outline how the Council will comply with the requirements set out in both acts. Once an update becomes available I will include that information in a future report to this Committee.

Supply and Allocations Report 2022-2023

In line with the Housing Allocations Scheme, the annual Supply and Allocation of Social Housing Report estimates the proportion of social lettings to be made to each of the priority groups on the council's waiting list, based on available supply (known as projections). The recommended projections for 2022/23 are summarised below in Table 1. They take into account competing demands for social housing and the council's statutory duties and strategic priorities and overall, the aim is to achieve a balanced approach to lettings. A similar number of lettings to last year is proposed in advance of a full review of the Allocation Policy set to commence later this year. A comprehensive item on the review of the Supply and Allocations Policy is due to be brought to this committee at a later date.

Table 1: Projections 2022/23

General Needs	Studio	1-Bed	2-Bed	3-Bed	4+ Bed	Total	%
Homeless	24	79	63	43	0	209	45%
Westminster Council Tenants	4	49	50	38	8	149	32%
Housing Register	57	34	8	6	0	105	23%
Total General Needs	85	162	121	87	8	463	
CSH	42	204	5	0	0	251	35%
Grand Total	127	366	126	87	8	714	

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

The GLA activated two Heat Health Alerts this summer to encourage all Local Authorities to initiate their local arrangements for ensuring the health and wellbeing of people who are on the street. During this period, Additional Outreach Teams across the City encouraged rough sleepers to take-up the offer of safe space in a day centre and/or facility. We targeted approximately 350 people who were offered one or more of the following services including: enhanced welfare checks for those known to be vulnerable to the heat (both on the street and in accommodation), shower facilities available throughout the heat wave, wide distribution of water and sun cream both on the streets daily and throughout our supported housing and hostels, overnight respite for those at most risk, and extended support to pets on the street.

Homelessness demand during the first quarter of 2022/23 has increased by 5% compared to the previous financial year. 497 homeless applications were recorded between Q1 of 2022/23 compared to 471 the previous year representing a 5% increase over the period. We are pleased to report we have exceeded our target in letting 49 three-bedroom properties to households on the homeless list year surpassing our projection of 29. We continue to experience higher numbers of rough sleepers during summer months but there are concerns the levels of those with no resource to public funds is rising in the City. In July, the street count number of rough sleepers was 280 up from 229 in June a 22% increase in one month.

Temporary Accommodation

The Council procures both Temporary Accommodation (TA) and private rented sector properties in line with our current Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy. Westminster currently manages a total TA stock of over 2700 properties. More than 1200 are in-borough and majority of the remainder is located in East and North London. All units should comply with TA Standards and Providers are required to meet these standards. Once a property becomes void as a re-let and let, the TA Provider must confirm that the property is fully compliant. The Council has also directly purchased over 220 family sized properties both inside and outside of the borough for use as TA and this programme is continuing. This has been an alternative of providing quality housing for the homeless. Please see Table 2 for a breakdown on location and size of these units.

Supporting Residents Through the Cost-of-Living Crisis

The senior Housing management team has been instructed to ensure all of the help and support signposting and information is available to all staff as to where to refer people in food or fuel poverty. Specifically, our Customer Service team is making all staff aware of the assistance available at the first point of contact so the team know where to direct people, how to refer and who internally needs to be involved, this support will also be extended to those in temporary accommodation in and out of the borough. All Housing Officers and Surveyors have been asked to raise awareness and to have the support conversations with our residents when door knocking or carrying out home visits.

The Income Team are having conversations with all of our tenants at the same time as we are discussing the rent arrears and we are signposting to help and assistance with our external agencies as well as referring to the discretionary fund. Throughout the fall the Leasehold Collection team will be signposting our residents when we speak to them about their service charge accounts.

Greening in the Housing Service

We are very pleased that we have retained our Green Flag status this year on the following Estates: Churchill Gardens, Lillington and Longmoore Gardens and Lisson Green. We have also won the coveted English Heritage Site Accreditation For Lisson Green, which is awarded for conservation of historical features to a high standard and maintenance of their historic character and appearance. We are grateful for the hard work and dedication from our contractors, resident groups and volunteers.

On August 12, we proudly opened the first Children's sensory garden on a Westminster Housing Estate at Lillington and Longmoore. Working with residents, an underused outdoor space has been transformed for the primary use of vulnerable children who require sensory stimulation. We hope that the garden will provide endless opportunities for learning and development, and we look forward to carrying out similar projects in different parts of the borough to provide opportunities to all children.

Communicating with Leaseholders

Our Key Lessee Group is made up of nearly 400 residents (lessees and freeholders) across the City to allow residents to scrutinise elements of service charges before they are invoiced. Key lessees are sent billing information via email before the service charge bills are issued. Queries received from key lessees are then investigated, thus avoiding a costly and time-consuming re-issuing of bills, as well as building confidence in the accuracy of the billing process. The scheme operates to allow transparency of information and affords our residents a real opportunity to participate in the calculation process before invoices are raised.

The uptake for this initiative this year is double the number of last year and we are aiming to increase the uptake further with more communications and advertising. We are also in the process of requesting demographic information from our key lessees to validate if our engagement is diverse and inclusive.

Communicating with Residents

Officers are currently in the process of writing to all residents in Council Housing to let them know who their Housing Officer is and how to contact them. Residents are also always welcome to reach out via the YourHome e-newsletter which is sent to over 12,000 housing tenants and leaseholders issued fortnightly.

Officers are currently recruiting residents to a Resident Panel as part of the Council's wider Housing Review. We had 51 residents who had applied to join. We have now written to all applicants to find out more about them, including demographical information, so we can assist with putting together a diverse cohort.

In line with the New Administration's priorities, Housing Services has started an initiative to have residents take part in online consultations and polling. To date over 200 residents have signed up and we will restart this group in the fall. We aim to consult the group every 4-6 weeks on various service improvements.

Resident Engagement Activities and Opportunities

Over the school holidays our Resident Engagement Team has taken part or run 7 community events reaching over 1000 residents. As a legacy of COVID-19, monthly online briefing sessions continue with our Resident Association representatives. During the month of July, 8 meetings were held with residents regarding Major Works across the City. Resident Advocates continue to be on Lillington and Longmore one day a week to meet with residents and resolve outstanding repairs, including a door knocking exercise on Sheltered Scheme to explain upcoming repairs and how it will affect them.

Housing Surgeries in Westminster

In alignment with our Fairer Westminster Vision, a Cross-Council project is currently underway to find suitable spaces among Council owned property to hold various surgeries with officers from across the service areas. While this is being explored further, I would like to highlight that we currently run two in person Housing surgeries at the Lillington & Longmore Community Hall (9am to 12pm every Tuesday), and the Soho Estate office (9am to 12pm weekly every Wednesday). At the beginning of October, we will open our third surgery site at the Beethoven Centre.

Residents First Programme

The Residents First Programme aims to review and deliver a new and revitalised Housing Service following the recent restructure. The programme is broken down into strands which cover various elements of how we will be engaging with residents and instilling a new culture within the department. This ranges from letters to residents introducing their new housing officer, implementation of a new mobile working solution, new service charters for repairs and leasehold services, and a review of the housing pages on the Council's website.

Community Thursdays

The flagship strand of Residents First which is currently being delivered is a new initiative called 'Community Thursdays'. Community Thursdays is an opportunity for teams across the Housing Service, to have a local and visible presence on our estates and talk to residents about issues that

matter to them. Ward Councillors are invited to join us, so that we can collectively work together to address wider issues, as well as provide advice and assistance. Each Thursday afternoon, a visit to a different estates around the borough takes place. To date we have visited more than 27 estates across 15 wards, 114 different members of staff have taken part, 10 different councillors have joined us, over 2300 doors knocked and 285 issues logged on our mobile solutions app.

Table 2 – Breakdown of Recently Acquired TA units in and out of borough.

	2-BED	3-BED	4-BED	5-BED	TOTAL
WCC	101	39	3	1	144
LB BARKING & DAGENHAM	38	5	0	0	43
LB REDBRIDGE	14	0	0	0	14
LB HARINGEY	1	0	0	0	1
LB HAVERING	22	7	0	0	29
LB NEWHAM	6	3	0	0	9
ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH	10	4	0	0	14
LB EENFIELD	2	4	0	0	6
LB HOUNSLOW	1	3	0	0	4
LB BEXLEY	2	0	0	0	2
LB CROYDON	1	0	0	0	1
LB BROMLEY	0	1	0	0	1
LB LEWISHAM	0	1	0	0	1
LB WALTHAM FOREST	0	2	0	0	2
BOROUGH OF BROXBOURNE	0	1	0	0	1
	198	70	3	1	272 *

* Please note that this figure includes 17 units which are void, either undergoing improvement works or awaiting letting/reletting as of 02/09/22.