

Date: 2 March 2023

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 7 December 2022:**
 - No decisions have been taken in this period.
- 2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress to date:**

2.1. Rough Sleeping Update

Our last street count took place on 1 February 2023 where we recorded 182 individuals, down from 250 as recorded in November 2022. Reductions were recorded across all demographics as compared to the last November street count. Area trends show a majority of rough sleepers seen throughout the borough localised on the Strand / Embankment, Victoria North, Pimlico and Soho. Major trends are as follows below:

- UK and ROI Nationals – A decrease to **59** from 76
- EEA Nationals – A decrease to **63** from 113
- Rest of the World - A decrease to **12** from 20

During the count 36 tents were recorded across the borough, but it was noted at least 15 appeared to be unoccupied. Though tents do act as a hindrance to our approach to dealing with homelessness/ rough-sleeping and makes it difficult for police and others to properly identify those residing in tents, there is currently no specific legislation with regards to the removal of tents, where a tent is clearly being used/contains personal belongings and is not causing an obstruction.

2.2. Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

The aim of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is to prevent loss of life and to reduce rough sleeping during extreme weather conditions (below 0°C). Everyone who is sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness in Westminster has the opportunity to come in to one of our hotels listed below and engage with our services who are there to help.

In line with previous practice, we have been working collaboratively with partners this winter to ensure additional winter pressure funding is implemented effectively across the Rough Sleeping

Service with our aim to reduce the numbers of homeless rough sleepers. This year we will access up to three separate hotels between November 2022 and March 2023. The hotels we will operate are:

- **St Giles** Bedford Avenue, London WC1B 3GH (West End)
- **The London** 32 Sussex Gardens, London W2 1UL (Hyde Park)
- **Comfort Inn** 73 Queensborough Terrace, London W2 3SU (Bayswater)

2.3. Anti-Social Behaviour Update

Open ASB Cases	Total – 185 cases West – 36 cases South – 60 cases South – 60 cases North – 48 cases Central – 41 cases
Top 3 Categories (No. of cases)	Noise – 47 cases Verbal abuse / harassment – 42 cases Drug use / dealing – 40 cases
Top 3 Wards/Estates	Mozart / Lydford & Avenue Gardens – 21 cases Pimlico – 18 cases Church street – 16 cases
ASB Case Handling Resident Satisfaction	Year to date - 65% (as of January 2023)
Number of Legal Cases	40 (including cases waiting for court hearing dates)

2.4. Update on Moving Estate Security Pilot

On 28 November 2022 we began a roaming security pilot and appointed The Way Forward Services (TWF Services) to support the programme. As part of the pilot 4 key estates were identified to benefit from the service, Lisson Green, Hallfield Estate, Lydford Estate and Lillington and Longmore with flexibility to move the service to other areas of concern as identified by the Housing ASB team, Housing Management and Estate Services.

The service runs 7 days per week and shifts are 10 hours long, with hours of operation from 6pm to 4am, but there will be some shifts held at an earlier time so that joint visits with local Housing teams or the Police can also take place. The service consists of two uniformed patrol officers (SIA licensed) in a dedicated branded patrol vehicle. They will be equipped with mobile devices enabling constant communication, to log any issues, and their whereabouts during shifts.

The officers are to patrol designated blocks and estates to identify, remedy and deter Anti-social Behaviour (ASB). It is important to note that the service is not intended to be a policing enforcement role when dealing with ASB, as the main objective of the pilot is to observe, deter and gather intelligence, communicate where it is safe to do so and inform relevant Council teams and local law enforcement of any conflict, to enable them to formulate a plan to alleviate any issues. We plan to consult with relevant Residents Associations and Ward Members within the last month of the pilot (May-June 2023) to seek feedback about the service. At that point a decision will be made on the possibility of extending the pilot for a further 6 months.

2.5. Temporary Accommodation

We have recently purchased 68 properties linked to the Right to Buy Back programmes (RTBB) including all properties purchased in borough, either for use as social rented or temporary accommodation. From this activity to date we have benefited from a £5 million grant from the Greater London Authority (GLA) under the RTBB programme. An additional 27 properties are agreed with vendors in borough that will also be included in the RTBB programmes with a further 10 in negotiations. Once we have delivered our full allocation of 88 units under the RTBB our GLA grant will be raised to £6.3 million in support of our efforts to house those who need it throughout the City.

2.6. Repairs Service Update

At the time of writing (15 February) the Repairs Teams currently has a total of 3,817 live repairs in the system with 2,794 of those being routine repairs and 692 being classified as urgent. A majority of the repairs that are currently live regard plumbing, carpentry, electric and painting works. Currently our estates with the highest concentration of repairs are Churchill Gardens, Mozart, Little Venice, Queen's Park and Lillington & Longmore.

Since January 2023 we have had completed 3,973 repairs of which 1,652 jobs were raised as a 4 hour or 24-hour priority which all require follow on jobs as we only attend and make safe under this priority. Officers continue to work with residents and contractors to ensure all repairs are completed in a safe and timely manner.

2.7. Pimlico District Heating Undertaking (PDHU) Update

Cross-Cabinet discussions continue to progress regarding the future of the PDHU network which provides heating and hot water to 3,306 homes and 50 commercial units and schools. The Council currently spends £1.97 million per year maintaining and repairing the network and a further £1.7 million on flat repairs related to PDHU. We are in the process of separating Morgan House which will reduce water pressure from the PDHU network resulting in fewer leaks. A full substantive item on PDHU will be brought to the April date of this Committee.

2.8. Managing Mould and Damp

Each winter Housing residents across Westminster struggle to keep condensation and mould out of their homes. This is a particular challenge in homes with insufficient insulation, heating and ventilation, and this year the problem is compounded by the cost-of-living crisis. To help with this problem, we are trialling innovative solutions such as rolling out a pilot of 300 condensation sensors in Council owned properties, and we have invested £2.2 million in Specialist Ventilation systems over the last three years to address mould and condensation in 3,500 homes across the City, with a further 750K allocated for 22/23 financial year to install systems in an additional 420 homes.

We encourage our housing tenants to report damp, condensation, and mould. We advertise both a telephone number and an online form to be completed on our website to resolve these issues. Once the issue has been reported, we will be in touch within three working days to arrange a visit.

2.9. Fire and Building Safety Update

As a requirement of the new Building Safety Act 2022 all multi-occupied residential buildings have regulations that require the Council as the responsible person to provide residents with fire safety instructions and information on the importance of fire doors. Housing Officers have already begun planning for these changes and have a robust plan in place to ensure we are going above and beyond to keep our tenants and leaseholders safe.

A brief summary of new requirements is as follows, in high-rise residential buildings the Council will be required to provide up-to-date electronic and hard copy building plans / information about the design and materials of the external wall system for the local Fire and Rescue Service and inform them of any material changes to these walls. We will undertake monthly checks on the operation of lifts intended for use by firefighters, and evacuation lifts in the building and check the functionality of other key pieces of firefighting equipment and install signage visible in low light or smoky conditions that identifies flat and floor numbers in the stairwells of relevant buildings.

In all multi-occupied residential buildings with two or more sets of domestic premises, the Council will provide relevant fire safety instructions to their residents, which will include instructions on how to report a fire, and provide residents with information relating to the importance of fire doors in fire safety.

2.10. Housing Surgeries

Talks continue to progress on the creation of additional localised Housing estate offices and creating more frequent Housing surgeries throughout the borough. Currently drop-in Housing surgeries are taking place at the following dates and times:

- Lillington and Longmore Residents Hall: Tuesdays 10am to 1pm
- Soho & Covent Garden Estate Office: Wednesdays 9am to 12pm
- Beethoven Centre: The first and third Monday of every month 2pm to 4.30pm

2.11. Community Thursday's Update

Since the Community Thursday's initiative began on 9 June 2022, as of 1 February 2023, there have been several key highlights to note. We have visited 78 estates across 17 wards, knocked on roughly 8,000 doors and spoken to nearly 3,000 residents. 201 different officers across the Growth, Planning and Housing Service have joined these walkabouts in an active effort to be more visible in our communities.

All frontline Housing Officers now have access to Rapid (our mobile reporting solution) ensuring swifter and better monitoring of issues being reported. We will be further integrating Rapid into existing systems to improve functionality and tracking cases, adding risk flags, and capturing feedback from residents. We have taken on feedback and improved communications for Community Thursdays, with posters, texting residents in advance and full information on a website page advertising the future programme of dates/estates, and we are continuously improving the calling cards given to residents with more useful information and will add the local Housing Officer's details.