



City of Westminster

Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 2 March 2023

Portfolio: Climate Action, Regeneration & Renters

The Report of: Councillor Matt Noble

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1. Key decisions made in the preceding period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated 7 December 2022:

- 07/12/2022 - Review of Fees for House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences
- 16/01/2023 - Ebury Estate Renewal – Delivery Strategy & Viability Position – Called-in on 23/01/2023
- 23/01/2023 - Church Street Procurement Strategy
- 23/01/2023 - MEES Plus Grant Policy
- 13/02/2023 - Westminster Community Homes (WCH) Revised Funding Arrangements

2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress to date.

2.1. Climate Action

2.2. Sustainable City Charter Update

The Sustainable City Charter which aims to encourage Westminster businesses of any shape or size to reduce the City's carbon footprint has currently 49 expressions of interest and 11 full Charter participants since its launch on 15 November. We and the Westminster Property Association (WPA) continue to promote the Charter on our corporate channels and are currently developing an improved public relations pack for our partners.

2.3. Climate Essentials for Business

Climate Essentials for Business provides free tools and support to help businesses work towards net zero emissions, which includes an online platform to calculate your carbon footprint, a report outlining your emissions and reduction strategy, an energy audit of your premises and crucially access to networks of like-minded businesses. Seven small businesses in Westminster have signed up for the pilot and attended the first onboarding sessions.

2.4. Energy Advice & Support (Green Doctors)

A Warm Homes Advice Service is available this year and will be provided by a company called Groundwork. Following receipt of a referral, Green Doctors will visit the occupant to provide energy advice. This service is available to anyone over the age of 65, on a low income or who has a long-

term health condition or disability. Housing Colleagues will reach out the Green Doctors and ask if they would be willing to join CAB Housing Surgeries and engage with residents face-to-face. As of January, 142 households have received Green Doctor support over the 2022/23 financial year. The Green Doctors will explain how to make your home energy efficient, can install energy saving devices and offer impartial advice on switching energy providers. They can also support by helping to switch your energy tariff, supporting with accessing the Warm Homes Discount or Priority Services Register, support with applications for energy or water debt relief, and can provide referrals for the installation of larger energy saving measures if needed. Further information on the Green Doctors including how to register for a consultation can be found on our Council Website or on their website at <https://london.greendoctors.org.uk/>.

2.5. Pimlico District Heating Undertaking (PDHU) Update

Our new Fairer Westminster strategy highlights the Council's ambition to take action on climate change with the aim of becoming a net zero Council by 2030. PDHU accounts for over a third of the Council's direct emissions making it a key focus area for emission reduction. PDHU is a critically important asset due to its significant economic, environment and political impact. Cross-Cabinet discussions are ongoing regarding the future of PDHU, however, it is noted there are several strategic reasons to invest PDHU such as to improve the overall condition of the network which will result in fewer leaks, and to become more energy efficient specifically in regards to the energy price crisis.

2.6. Biodiversity Update

I am pleased to announce we have now been recognised by the Pesticide Action Network for our work in banning the use of glyphosates on our estates and all Council owned land. The Green Infrastructure Audit Tender Applications closed in early February and are now being assessed. We hope to receive recommendations on planting and further opportunities for biodiversity and greening in Westminster with the results of the submission.

Officers are currently working on consolidating greening and biodiversity activity, opportunities, and advice into one webpage on the Council's main website, which will include how individuals can contribute individually to these aims. Officers are also in discussions with other Local Authorities including City, H&F, and RBKC to discuss ecological expertise and recruitment.

3. Regeneration

3.1. Updates to the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy

Work continues to progress at pace with work on the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy which aims to align the Council's own housing delivery with the Fairer Westminster programme and help to meet the demands of the housing waiting list by increasing the number of truly affordable homes in the borough.

Currently we have converted an additional 143 units in our Development Programme to Council homes for social rent as a result of our initial Truly Affordable Housing Strategy changes. These units are comprised from our development sites at Luton Street, Ashbridge, Luxborough, 300 Harrow Road, Torridon, West End Gate and Westmead. With those initial changes including homes we have purchased for social rent use under the Right to Buy Back Scheme, changes to tenure at Church Street Site A and Ebury Bridge our total stock of social rent homes has risen to 1,600 in our current Development Programme.

3.2. Church Street Programme Update

The successful Church Street Residents Ballot on Sites A, B and C ran from 28th November – 20th December. 73% of voting residents in neighbourhoods known as sites A, B and C voted yes in favour of the proposals for the regeneration. With a voter turnout of 56% which includes residents who have moved off the estate but have the ‘right to return’, a positive result means the council is now able to move forward with plans to build new high quality, affordable homes by unlocking funding from the Greater London Authority, create new pedestrianised routes and high quality green public spaces, create new community facilities, play spaces and a new, enhanced library, and create new jobs and training opportunities. The Church Street Regeneration Programme will deliver around 1,100 homes overall, including the replacement of all existing council homes at social rent levels, and genuinely affordable homes will make up over 50% of the homes delivered in the scheme.

3.3. Ebury Programme Update

Residents were asked their view on revised plans as Westminster City Council held a resident ballot on the Ebury Bridge estate. The ballot ran from 23 January – 13 February, and residents voted yes in favour of the plans with a voter turnout rate of 66.7%. Although the regeneration of the estate is already underway, the Council wanted to give residents the final say on how the scheme will be delivered and a chance to endorse the Council’s proposals to increase the number of new affordable homes for social rent.

3.4. 300 Harrow Road

Following change of tenure resulting from the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy, this scheme will now be delivered as a 100% affordable scheme, providing 77 social rent homes and 35 intermediate tenure homes. A funding bid seeking £9.3 million additional affordable housing grant has been made and has been approved in principle by the Greater London Authority (GLA). Construction continues on site with initial handover work underway with a particular focus on landscape, external and highways works to ensure a smooth transition to the next phases of work.

3.5. 291 Harrow Road

The recently acquired 291 Harrow Road site located in Westbourne Green/Maida Hill and is part of the Harrow Road Place Plan. It consists of 24 specialist housing units leased from the National Health Service (NHS) to Westminster Society & Yarrow Housing and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). The site is currently undergoing a feasibility study and we are reviewing three architect’s proposals to redevelop the site into a high-quality mixed-use scheme, which will include improved landscaping, connectivity to the canal, transport connections, and enable future opportunities for Ascot House.

3.6. Torrison Development Update

On Friday 13 January, a letter was issued to all local residents inviting them to a public meeting which took place on Thursday 19 January at Tollgate House Residents Hall to discuss concerns around the Torrison Development project. The letter signposted residents to the most recent RSK compilation report which is accessible via the Torrison website – with a high level summary of safety measures/working practices.

The council carries out rigorous safety checks prior to any development to make sure soil on a construction sites is completely safe before works begin. We recognise there are very low levels of contaminates in the soil. This is normal for a construction site in an urban area such as London. We would like to offer reassurance that the small risk posed by these contaminates has been carefully considered and mitigated against. They do not pose a health risk to residents in the surrounding area during construction or in the future.

4. Renters

4.1. Private Rented Sector (PRS) Charter Update

Officers continue to meet our PRS Working Group monthly which is comprised of registered providers, cross-Council services, and advocacy groups. During our late January meeting officers noted that stakeholders across the board are seeing very high rents in Westminster, which is a local and national trend.

As a part of the Fairer Westminster Strategy, this group continues to work on our Private Rented Sector Charter and is discussing what to include in the Charter such as key facts, current legislation, and where tenants can seek help / advice.

4.2. Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES)

The Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations set a minimum energy efficiency level for domestic private rented properties. In early January 2023 we launched our MEES Plus Grant Policy pilot scheme which will offer financial support to landlords to make energy efficiency improvements to their properties in line with the criteria set out by the MEES Plus Grant Policy.

Our adoption of the MEES Plus Grant Policy aims to deliver carbon savings that would not have occurred through MEES enforcement alone, provide a case study on how to overcome unique challenges to Westminster's ageing housing stock, complex mix of listed buildings and conservation areas, future proof Westminster properties to comply with a potentially increasing minimum energy efficiency standard (EPC E to C) and to inform future strategy, policy development and service delivery toward achieving net zero 2040.

We have secured £158,149 from the Carbon Offset Fund to apply the pilot to approximately 8-10 properties. Two of the guiding principles for the administration of grants are that landlords are expected to match fund works and grants will be capped at £10,000 per property (excluding landlord contribution).