

Appendix 1 - Future of Westminster Commission Housing Review – Council Response to Headline Recommendations

Headline recommendations from the Housing Review and the Council's response to those recommendations can be found below. Detailed recommendations in other Commission reports will be considered as we move forward in adopting strategies and delivering projects associated with programmes such as the Fairer Westminster Strategy and the Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP).

| Headline Housing Strategy | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|
| | Housing Review Recommendation | Council Recommended Response | Headline Response |
| | The Council should publish a new Housing Strategy, together with a Delivery Plan and an Equalities Impact Assessment, in 2024 looking 3-5 years ahead. | Agree | The Council will propose a framework strategy to situate and complement planned strategies for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping and the Strategic Asset Management Plan (building and environmental sustainability), set to launch in 2024. In line regulation, the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy will have a full statutory consultation in addition to an equalities impact assessment. |
| Housing Management Report | | | |
| | Housing Review Recommendation | Council Recommended Response | Headline Response |
| 1. | Re-appoint the Residents Panel for the remainder of the year, appointing a permanent panel in 2024. | Agree | Officers have met with the Resident's Panel in late April and are currently setting the work programme for 2023/24. |
| 2. | Support and grow local Residents Associations to (1) put them on a stronger footing and (2) incorporate them within the Residents Panel. | (1) Agree (2) Agreed in part | (1) A new dedicated resource is in place to support and enable Resident Associations (RAs). This aims to facilitate representation and enable more RAs so all residents have a voice. (2) The Resident's Panel was created through a transparent process with the aim to ensure a wide representation of residents across the borough. RA members should be part of the Panel and going forward we will actively promote participation in the Panel by RAs. We will examine appropriate mechanisms for doing this. The overall priority will remain to achieve a representative Panel and proposing strengthening RA engagement to enable stronger networking between RAs and the Resident's Panel. |
| 3. | Negotiate the new Repairs Charter with the Panel by 2024, in good time to influence the specification and procurement of new repairs contracts. | Agree | The Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan states a commitment to create a Repairs Charter due to be released in 2023/24. Work is already underway on a draft Charter; this will be discussed with the Resident's Panel before a wider consultation is undertaken. |
| 4. | Note the pressures in the repairs system, which might require additional funding in 2023/24 and subsequently, extending and implementing the proposed improvement plan as quickly as possible. | Agree | This programme of work will be taken forward through the Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP). |
| 5. | Develop an asset management plan for the council's housing stock, including addressing the Ombudsman's recommendations for damp and mould and implementing <i>Awaab's Law</i> . Government to deliver Awaab's Law - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) | Agree | A new Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) will be developed with the intention to launch in 2024/5. As of Winter 2023, a new operating model has specifically been in place to manage damp and mould cases. |
| 6. | Negotiate the new Leaseholders Charter to launch in 2024. | Agree | A draft Charter is in currently production and will be discussed with the Residents Panel and then consulted on at the Westminster Leaseholder conference later this year. |
| 7. | Continue to prioritise improvements in communications with residents and continuous improvement at the call centre, reviewing progress in Autumn 2023. | Agree | This programme of work will be taken forward through the Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP). |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| | | | The Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan 2023/24 has already committed to delivering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a 1/3 increase in frontline Housing Officers; • giving our tenants better face-to-face contact with our Housing Officers by increasing the locations our officers can work from across the City; and • improving the quality of service provided when you call our staff by using better customer service technology. |
| 8. | Implement as soon as possible the proposed increase in local service points with a new 5 th Service Centre at Mozart Estate, other estate offices where possible, and an expansion in the number of surgeries. | Agree | A new service centre will be operational from Bruckner Street on the Mozart Estate in May 2023 and further announcements on this issue will be made in due course. There is a cross-Council Community Hubs programme currently underway where Housing Services will have a prominent presence and will ultimately expand the number of face-to-face surgeries we operate across the City. |
| 10. | Develop a management action plan aimed at improving the consistency of frontline service delivery designed to build satisfaction with services. | Agree | This programme of work will be taken forward through the Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP). |
| 11. | Continue to develop practical ideas to support residents facing hardship like the rent support fund. | Agree | Officers note the next tranche of Housing Support Fund, and the new Rent Support Fund, are imminently going to be signed off and will be rolled out and monitored to inform future ideas. |
| 12. | Consolidate the 2023/24 cost of service improvements into HRA base budgets. | To be considered. | This will be considered as part of the yearly budget setting process. |
| 13. | Continue to review recharges to the HRA from the rest of the council to ensure they are reasonable and justifiable. | Agree | This is in progress and will feed into this year's budget setting process (as well as taking any early opportunities to reduce recharges into the Housing Revenue Account). |
| Housing Supply Report | | | |
| | Housing Review Recommendation | Council Recommended Response | Headline Response |
| 1. | Retain high level political support for and oversight of the Truly Affordable Homes Strategy. | For Cabinet consideration. | The Truly Affordable Homes Strategy has been adopted by Cabinet and our current work programme is in line with the Strategy along with set commitments in the Fairer Westminster Strategy 2023/24. |
| 2. | Adopt a 'whole council' approach as set out in the report to maximise truly affordable housing, embedding the three priorities of a) social rent homes, b) intermediate homes for key workers, and c) high quality temporary accommodation in all related programmes across the whole council; and publish an annual delivery plan covering all supply initiatives. | Agree, with detail to be developed. | One of the recommendations from the housing review carried out by external consultant <i>31Ten</i> is an annual Plan/Strategy for housing supply which will provide the framework for the Council's and its delivery bodies' delivery programmes. The scope of this recommendation will need further development as for the supply of Temporary Accommodation may sit better within the Housing or Homelessness Strategy outlined above. |
| 3. | Increase the priority given to the acquisition of homes for permanent social rented housing and for high quality temporary accommodation. | Agree, subject to budget allocation. | There is currently funding in the budget for the accelerated and augmented Temporary Accommodation Acquisition Programme. There is no future programme for spot purchases of social rent homes but work is being undertaken to explore potential opportunities that might facilitate this. |
| 4. | Develop a new 'Housing Compact' with Registered Providers (RPs) in the city setting out all the areas where the council and RPs should collaborate. | Agree, subject to identifying/allocating resources. | Work is underway to identify resource needed from the General Fund for this activity. Any structured collaboration with RPs deemed to be appropriate for agreeing a 'compact' with should seek clear commitments on improving service standards and stock retention alongside discussions around future supply. |
| 5. | Look to augment council resources by investigating a flexible range of new partnerships with institutional finance (eg pension funds), registered providers, | Agree, to the extent necessary. | Partnerships with other social and intermediate housing providers will be considered through the 'Housing Compact' action above. |

| | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| | especially those with a commitment to Westminster, intermediate homes providers, and community-based housing organisations. | | |
| 6. | Develop the role of Westminster Community Homes (WCH) as a flexible vehicle to innovate and problem solve difficult cases. | Agree | The role and purpose of the Council's housing delivery vehicles is a key consideration in the housing review report recently completed by external consultant 31Ten. The Council's response to this report will be developed shortly but will include identifying a clear purpose for the vehicles and when best to deploy each. |
| 7. | Affirm its commitment to achieving as a minimum the current City Plan target of 35% affordable housing in developments across the city, with 50% on public land, and press on with the revision of the City Plan to reflect the council's housing priorities. | Agree | A full review of the City Plan has already been initiated with formal consultation on policy change taking place in October/November 2022 with adoption anticipated in 2025. |
| Homelessness and Housing Need Report | | | |
| | Housing Review Recommendation | Council Recommended Response | Headline Response |
| 1. | Establish an overarching Westminster Homelessness Board chaired by a senior politician. | To be considered. | The Council notes the work of the existing Westminster Partnership Board for homelessness and should consider this recommendation for reform in that context of work already underway. |
| 2. | Ensure that services have secure funding and plans in place to cope with a likely increase in homelessness over the next few years. | Agree | To be considered as part of the annual budget setting process and in the context of the emerging strategy work. |
| 3. | Prioritise additional resources for prevention of homelessness and early intervention. | Agree | As above. |
| 4. | Lobby government to make Local Housing Allowances realistic in relation to Temporary Accommodation costs and to increase homelessness grant. | Agree | Work will soon be underway to focus on future sustainable funding approaches, in regards to Homelessness and Rough-sleeping service delivery. |
| 5. | Agree and implement a 'Westminster Offer' to households in Temporary Accommodation setting out the services and support that will be provided. | Agree | Work is underway to identify the resource needed to implement this recommendation. |
| 6. | Rigorously monitor and enforce standards in Temporary Accommodation. | Agree | Officers note we currently have our own inspection regime for our self contained Temporary Accommodation and these arrangements remain under constant review. |
| 7. | Press on with the allocations review taking account of our agenda of issues; | Agree | The Supply and Allocation Review is being initiated shortly. |
| 8. | Develop a management action plan to improve the consistency of frontline service delivery and decision-making, focusing on learning from experience, feedback from complaints and casework, and a better understanding of the customer experience of the service; | Agree | This programme of work will be taken forward through the Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP). |
| 9. | Agree a tendering strategy for the Housing Solutions Service, identifying any parts of the service that would be better delivered in-house, with a clear specification on early intervention, casework management, and getting decisions right first time; | Agree | Work is already underway to identify the best delivery route for the Housing Solutions Service in the future, which includes consideration of insourcing options for all or part of the service as part of the Corporate Insourcing Programme Approach. |
| 10. | Press on with the revised rough sleeping strategy, co-produced through a new Rough Sleeping Partnership, making leadership on rough sleeping a political priority for the council. | Agree | Proposal to be put forward as part of a potential Rough Sleeping Partnership being delivered via the Homelessness Partnership Board as per the recommendation above. |