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# Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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<b>Title:</b>	Retrofitting in Westminster
<b>Report of:</b>	Amy Jones, Director of Environment
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Cllr Matt Noble, Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	Fairer Environment, Fairer Housing
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## 1. Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the Council's activities to upscale retrofitting of buildings in Westminster, a key priority of our Climate Emergency Action Plan. This follows a high-level summary of Westminster's climate action programme provided to the committee in October 2022.

An update on the Council's social housing retrofit programme is provided under a separate cover.

## 2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

The Committee is asked to consider and provide a view on:

- The range of activity taken to date in progressing retrofit activity across Westminster and how this may be accelerated, including navigating key challenges such as:

- The need to leverage significant funding to scale-up delivery of retrofit action.
- How best to raise awareness, support, and take-up of retrofit measures in Westminster communities.
- The opportunity to upskill residents to exploit retrofit employment opportunities and build the capacity required to deliver retrofit at scale.

### **3. Background**

The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and set a target to reduce city-wide emissions to net zero by 2040. The Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) adopted in November 2021 sets out nearly 70 council-led actions to support delivery of this target.

The plan identifies buildings as Westminster’s largest emission source and the most significant challenge to overcome to successfully deliver our net zero 2040 ambitions. Collectively buildings are responsible for 86% of Westminster’s emissions – 15% from the city’s 121,000 homes and 71% from non-domestic buildings.

Emissions from buildings also represent the largest source of air pollution within Westminster, while poor building condition and energy performance are drivers of and exacerbate issues relating to fuel poverty, the cost-of-living crisis and the health and wellbeing of communities. Delivery of the retrofit agenda therefore has the opportunity to deliver a wide range of co-benefits to Westminster communities.

The challenge of delivering retrofit across Westminster is considerable. While new developments are required to meet net zero emissions from their operations, most of the buildings that will exist in 2040 (our city-wide net zero target) are already built. On average these currently perform well below a net zero standard. Data from the Local Area Energy Plan work shows that 36% of office buildings in Westminster (the most common non-domestic building type) have an EPC rating of E or below. Meanwhile, for domestic stock, 16% of homes in Westminster have an EPC rating of E or below, and 73% are heated using fossil fuel (gas boilers).

The high-ambition decarbonisation pathway developed by consultants, Anthesis, which informed the CEAP, outlines significant energy-efficiency and clean energy improvements (retrofit) required in Westminster’s buildings by 2040 including:

- Substantial fabric improvements (for example wall insulation and window glazing) to all categories of buildings, including to 72,000 homes, to substantially reduce their heating demand.
- Lighting, appliance and cooking upgrades to reduce energy demand and transition from gas to electric cooking.
- New low-carbon heating systems including a combination of decentralised systems and heat networks; and,

- Installation of local renewable energy generation capacity (primarily solar panels).

Beyond retrofitting our social housing estate and corporate property, the CEAP sets out roles for the council in retrofit including influencing and encouraging retrofit through planning and partnership.

While good progress has been made in the past 18 months, there are a number of challenges to delivering retrofit at the required pace and scale to achieve our net zero aims. These include:

- Funding
- Skills availability and industry capacity
- Compliance with strict heritage legislation
- Overcoming challenges with complex building ownership arrangements.
- Levels of general awareness and understanding of the benefits and process of building retrofit.

Through the Energy and Green Transition strand of the Future of Westminster commission, officers have sought expert views on how to further our work on retrofitting. Officers are awaiting the recommendation, due in the summer.

#### 4. Recent and current activity

Significant progress has been made in the past 18 months to move forward the retrofit agenda in Westminster. This includes:

##### Cross-cutting activity

- Establishing a **Retrofit Taskforce** of industry experts and local stakeholders to identify solutions to key retrofit challenges faced in Westminster. External funding of £300,000 has recently been secured to support delivery of the Taskforce's priority workstreams for the next two years including:
  - Pilot retrofit projects to test boundaries of current policy and practice and inform policy and process improvements.
  - Development of building typology-based delivery approaches / procurement clubs.
  - A retrofit skills and training pilot; and,
  - A stewardship programme including online resource hub, bi-annual retrofit conferences and retrofit demonstrator home.
- Commissioning a **Local Area Energy Plan** which involves gathering extensive data on Westminster's energy system to model the changes needed to make the city's heating and power systems net zero by 2040. The plan will identify the most cost-effective pathway to net zero, including which buildings across the borough should be prioritised for improved insulation and for low-carbon technologies such as heat pumps and solar PV. This is due to be completed in late 2023.

## Support for non-domestic retrofit

- Launching the **Sustainable City Charter** for owners and occupiers of non-domestic property across Westminster. Signatories agree to eight commitments including to work with other building stakeholders (e.g., tenants, managing agents etc) to create a plan to retrofit the building to achieve operational net zero emissions by 2040 or earlier. In return, Charter participants are offered a range of benefits, including access to exclusive knowledge-sharing events, access to a digital toolkit (under development), and priority participation in pilot retrofit projects offered through the Retrofit Taskforce. To date there are 24 full signatories to the Charter and a further 70 organisations have expressed interest in joining since the launch in November 2022.
- Launching the **Business Energy Saving Scheme** and **Climate Essentials for Business** pilot which support small and medium enterprises to identify retrofit measures.
- Allocating £1m of carbon offset funding to deliver carbon savings at WCC owned community buildings as part of the Corporate Property corporate energy efficiency (Refit) Programme. Works are underway to deliver these energy efficiency measures and are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023/24.
- Utilising funding from Westminster's first Green Bond to support energy efficiency improvements in council-owned assets.

## Support for home retrofit

- Introducing discounted pre-application advice for household retrofit measures including energy-efficient glazing, heat pumps and solar panels in March 2022. There has initially been relatively limited uptake of this, with 24 requests for discounted preapplication advice, most seeking advice on windows and double glazing. However, we are looking for ways to publicise this more widely including through the MEES programme and highlighting this as an option within retrofit how to guides.
- Publishing a series of '**retrofit how to guides**' to provide simple practical advice on retrofit measures commonly proposed in Westminster including window improvements and air source heat pumps [Planning householder retrofit how-to guides | Westminster City Council](#)
- Delivering a **Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) enforcement pilot**, enforcing the minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) standard of E. The Pilot resulted in 30 private rented homes being brought into compliance, saving 72.3 tonnes of CO2 per year.

- Launching the **MEES Plus Grant Pilot Scheme** offering targeted financial support to landlords to make energy efficiency improvements to private rented properties rated EPC E and lower. There has been a good level of interest with 17 properties currently shortlisted, however only one has completed a formal application to date and no associated works have been delivered yet.
- Delivering an award-winning **energy saving show home** in a retrofitted council home to demonstrate the process and benefits of home retrofit. Over 300 visitors attended the home and are now more likely to insulate, improve their windows and install solar panels. Lessons from the home are informing our council housing retrofit programme and development of advice and support to all other tenures.
- Soft-launched a '**Home energy savings hub**' on the Council website ([www.westminster.gov.uk/home-energy-savings](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/home-energy-savings)) outlining current advice and support available to households with information split by tenure type. Officers have now also begun exploring opportunities for a more effective information hub.
- Delivered **energy and fuel poverty advice** and support to vulnerable households via the **Green Doctors advice service**. Residents using the service receive either a telephone consultation or home visit, where they are given bespoke energy advice on how to reduce energy and water usage around the home. As of May 2023, a total of 261 Westminster residents have received support through the service.
- Promoting **Mayoral and government schemes** including the Warmer Homes Programme and Energy Company Obligation and Home Upgrade Grant schemes. Officers are engaging with the government's new Great British Insulation Scheme to maximise uptake and benefits for Westminster households.

#### 4. Next steps

In addition to continued delivery of the activities above, the following next steps are planned to continue to build momentum on retrofit:

- Launch a webpage and call for Retrofit Pilot Expressions of Interest from stakeholders to deliver retrofit pilot projects with the **Retrofit Taskforce**.
- Secure additional capacity to support delivery on this agenda. This includes recruiting a **Senior Home Energy Officer** to co-ordinate and lead the design, development and management of fuel poverty and domestic energy efficiency support services, and a **Retrofit Innovation Officer** to co-ordinate and lead the Retrofit Taskforce's priority workstreams.
- Work with stakeholders, including community groups and social housing providers in **North Paddington**, to develop and deliver a tenure and landlord-

agnostic home energy savings programme to build demand for retrofit and triage to relevant support and delivery schemes.

- Adopt a **retrofit-first policy** for our City Plan that will place prioritisation on retrofitting and refurbishment of existing buildings in lieu of demolition for the purpose of making substantial embodied energy savings, reducing carbon emissions, and enhancing and conserving our existing building stock.
- Update the **Environment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** to provide more detailed guidance on retrofitting technologies and materials.
- Supporting and accelerating the delivery of community energy and decarbonisation projects, through better utilisation of the Council's **carbon offset fund**. This will include fast track delivery of carbon saving projects within the North Paddington community, as part of the wider North Paddington programme.
- Continued development of the **Sustainable City Charter** including development of exclusive events and toolkit for signatories and embedding of the Charter governance through a signatory-led Technical Working Group and Steering Group.
- Launching an energy-efficiency retrofit **grant scheme for SMEs** using carbon offset funding, which will be exclusively available to signatories of the Sustainable City Charter and/or businesses who have participated in the Business Energy Savings Scheme.
- Work with the Council's supply chain and training providers including Westminster Adult Education Services to understand **skills and training** requirements and develop and deliver training to support residents into retrofit jobs.
- **Engage residents** to inform the design and delivery of retrofit advice and support including via the Citizen's Climate Assembly.
- Improve our **insight and data** on non-Council retrofit delivery to better track progress towards net zero targets.
- Continue to embed retrofit across the Council's projects and BAU, maximising co-benefits including for fuel poverty, cost-of-living, air quality and public health agendas.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Report Author Damian Hemmings  
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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

This section is for any background papers used to formulate the report or referred to in the body of the report.

[High-Level Summary of Westminster's Climate Action Programme](#), October 2022