



<b>Date:</b>	19 July 2023
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Housing Services
<b>The Report of:</b>	Councillor Liza Begum, Cabinet Member for Housing Services
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**The following report includes my priority and delivery progress to date:**

### **1.1 Improving our Housing Services**

The Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP) was established in April 2023 to deliver a step change in the delivery of housing services, however, the Council has found that the challenges the housing service face require swift action and more focused attention.

From June 2023, the Housing Department has moved out of the Growth, Planning and Housing Directorate into a new Housing and Commercial Partnerships Directorate, led by Strategic Director Sarah Warman.

The improvement in housing is a priority for the Council and has the support and involvement of the entire Cabinet and Executive Leadership Team. The focus over the next twelve months will be on enabling all relevant teams to deliver the best possible services to residents and communities. The experience and feedback received from residents and staff will be central to the improvement journey.

### **1.2 Corporate Housing Improvement Programme - Activity Update**

Given the size and scale of the service, the programme has been divided into four workstreams which will enable a phased approach to the work. An early improvement plan has been developed for these focus areas which set out the programme priorities. The plan will also include a performance framework to ensure there is oversight of whether the actions are making the impact we want to see. To date the programme has focused on four areas:

1. Communications & Engagement
2. People & Culture
3. Customer Experience
4. Repairs

### **1.2.1 Communications & Engagement**

We are building on and improving participation in and engagement with residents, testing new methods of engagement, including deploying a new engagement platform (together with the communities' team) to increase visibility and put residents at the heart of improvement. This includes:

- Working with residents on a re-design on the Housing Section of the WCC website.
- Offering communications in a range of community languages.
- Engaging with residents identified as being vulnerable and working with them to determine the best to maintain on-going communications.

### **1.2.2 People & Culture**

Work is underway to design and implement an orientation session to roll out to all staff, whether in-house or as part of contracted services, which will focus on vision, values (including empathy and cultural awareness), customer experience and service standards.

There will be a continued focus on learning and development for staff including new housing induction programmes, shadowing/mentoring opportunities.

### **1.2.3 Customer Experience**

We are reviewing the customer experience for residents and how we can improve the interactions between residents and the Council. This will mean looking into our contact centre processes and how we can better use technology to create a smoother process for residents and officers. As part of this work, we'll be looking into the resident experience with complex cases and coming up with options on how to we can improve the experience with complaint resolution.

### **1.2.4 Repairs (CHIP Focus)**

It is vital that as part of the improvement programme we build a shared culture with our contractors focused on residents and our values of empathy and cultural awareness, customer experience and service standards.

We want to see improvements to the planning and resource scheduling for repairs and a focus on productivity and performance and customer experience including improvements to the follow-on process for booking repairs with residents.

## **1.3 Rent Support Fund**

The Rent Support Fund exists to help our council tenants struggling with rent payments during the cost-of-living crisis.

Since its establishment in February, the one-million-pound fund has been created specifically to help those in financial difficulty. The money is being used to cover some or all of the upcoming rent increases for households who are not entitled to full housing benefits. Tenants who are eligible for full benefits will receive the increase in their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit payments.

We want to make sure that tenants know about the fund which is why we are contacting our residents by text, phone, letters, and house calls. We are also reaching out to faith networks, libraries, and schools to ensure the message is received right across the city.

To date we have awarded 496 rent support payments, totalling £206,233. The average award is around £400. All wards have residents who have been supported through the fund (see Table 1 below).

Table 1:

Row Labels		Sum of Award (£)	#Wards
Abbey Road	£	7,105.54	16
Bayswater	£	5,932.94	13
Church Street	£	23,110.36	58
Churchill	£	2,390.70	5
Harrow Road	£	2,642.90	6
Knightsbridge and Belgravia	£	11,211.46	27
Lancaster Gate	£	2,836.08	9
Little Venice	£	11,677.37	29
Maida Vale	£	10,174.32	23
Marylebone	£	279.76	1
Out of Borough	£	1,612.78	5
Pimlico North	£	50,646.70	114
Pimlico South	£	43,091.94	98
Queen's Park	£	38,268.62	92
Regent's Park	£	8,439.08	21
St James's	£	1,855.36	5
Unspecified Ward	£	12,547.08	30
Vincent Square	£	18,538.52	44
West End	£	4,207.32	13
Westbourne	£	35,252.36	83
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<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>291,821.19</b>	<b>692</b>