



City of Westminster

Cabinet

Meeting or Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	15 July 2024
Classification:	General Release
Title:	2023/24 Fairer Westminster Annual Progress Overview
Description:	This report highlights the Council's overall performance and progress made towards realising Fairer Westminster outcomes by the end of 2023/24.
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Policy Context:	Delivery of Fairer Westminster
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
Report of:	Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director of Finance & Resources

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Council's four-year Fairer Westminster strategy continues its implementation through the annual Delivery Plan process, now in its second year. Supported by the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, this ensures resources are allocated to achieve the Fairer Westminster ambitions alongside delivering statutory and other specialist services.
- 1.2. This report highlights the Council's overall performance and progress made towards realising Fairer Westminster outcomes by the end of 2023/24. It summarises the actions delivered under the 2023/24 Delivery Plan and notable achievements during the first year of implementation, and provides an overview of performance across all its service areas.
- 1.3. Looking ahead, the second-year 2024/25 Delivery Plan has recently been published, outlining the Council's priority actions for 2024/25 to continue the implementation of a Fairer Westminster. Recognising the pressing challenges facing the City, such as the climate emergency, housing pressures, and inequality, the new plan outlines targeted initiatives to tackle these issues. The 2024/25 Delivery Plan can be accessed here: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/delivering-our-plan-build-fairer-westminster>

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1. Note the overall performance of the Council, and progress as at year-end (2023/24) towards the Fairer Westminster Strategy ambitions.
- 2.2. Note the Council's priority actions for 2024/25, as set out in the recently published 2024/25 Delivery Plan.

3. Background, including Policy Context

- 3.1. The Fairer Westminster Strategy, published in October 2022, outlines the Council's four-year vision to improve outcomes for residents, local businesses, and visitors across five key themes. In March 2023, the 2023/24 Delivery Plan was published, detailing specific actions to realise this vision. The five thematic pillars and their broad outcomes are:
 - Reducing inequalities through **Fairer Communities**
 - Achieving net-zero emissions for the Council by 2030 and for the City by 2040 under **Fairer Environment**
 - Providing social and affordable housing for those in need and improving frontline housing services through **Fairer Housing**
 - Delivering a strong and sustainable economy with employment opportunities and inclusive growth that benefits everyone via **Fairer Economy**
 - Listening to residents, meeting their needs through delivered services, and providing value for residents and businesses as part of a **Fairer Council**
- 3.2. Community collaboration, engagement, and transparency are central to the Fairer Westminster strategy. The Council has strengthened this commitment by making strategy progress updates, performance data, and comprehensive datasets publicly

available online in an accessible format. Targeted communications and public events have offered greater opportunities for communities to actively participate in decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. Recent City Survey results show that these efforts have made residents feel more informed and involved in decision-making.

- 3.3. The Fairer Westminster strategy provides context and direction for all aspects of the Council's work. The Council maintains comprehensive oversight and scrutiny of progress made on the Delivery Plan and the performance of statutory and day-to-day services. The Executive Leadership Team and Cabinet Members regularly review performance and delivery, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement across the Council's operations.

4. Progress Made Towards a Fairer Westminster in 2023/24

Overall progress against the 2023/24 Delivery Plan

- 4.1. Westminster City Council has made good overall progress in realising Fairer Westminster outcomes by the end of 2023/24. In the first year of its 2023/24 Delivery Plan, the Council set out 106 priority actions, with 85% either completed for annual actions or on track for multi-year efforts by year-end. While the remaining 12% experienced some slippage, the Council is closely monitoring these through its performance reporting.
- 4.2. Gauging the full impact of these actions on the medium to long-term Fairer Westminster outcomes will require time. External factors beyond the Council's control can also influence the results. Alongside implementing the Delivery Plan actions, the Council is also tracking key performance indicators to understand the tangible impact and success of its efforts. The following sections outline progress achieved at year-end, as well as areas requiring further improvement work and focus for 2024/25.

Fairer Communities

- 4.3. The Council is committed to supporting residents at every stage of life - from early childhood through to old age. The goal is to create an environment where all residents can thrive by strengthening community cohesion, reducing inequalities, and providing equal opportunities. Recent survey results from 2023 show 79% of residents feel the Council is improving their local area, and 92% agree that people from different backgrounds get along well together in the borough, reflecting an upward trend over the past few years.
- 4.4. For the youngest residents, the Council aims to provide the best start in life. The expanded Family Hubs Network now offers vital support services across the City, complemented by a new Family Information Hub co-developed with local families to guide them through available council advice and assistance. To understand children's unique post-pandemic needs, the Council conducted surveys and launched a new School Health service focused on delivering emotional wellbeing support directly within schools themselves. The Holiday Activity and Food programme was a big success in early 2024, providing activities and meals to over 1,400 children and young people during school breaks.

- 4.5. Regarding young people's care, the Council is ensuring that 100% of vulnerable children in care receive their necessary vaccinations. The target for re-registering children on protection plans within two years was met with a 0% re-registration rate, indicating effective intervention strategies to safeguard children at risk. The Council exceeded the target for Looked After Children placement stability, with 85% of children in care for more than 2.5 years remaining in the same placement for at least 2 years, providing them with a stable and secure environment.
- 4.6. Early years education is also a priority, with a 72% uptake of free early education placements for 2-year-olds achieved, exceeding the annual target. The Council has maintained a 100% completion rate for Education and Health Care Plans within the 20-week timeframe, ensuring timely support for children with special educational needs.
- 4.7. Westminster's schools continue achieving educational excellence. Over 96% of Westminster Schools were rated outstanding or good by Ofsted, primary schools outperformed national averages in reading, writing and maths, while secondaries exceeded national GCSE scores. More Westminster students achieved top A-level grades than the national average, including those with special educational needs who performed well above national levels. The award-winning Tri-borough Music Hub, in partnership with world-renowned organisations like the Royal Albert Hall, provides world-class music education. The Westminster Community Schools Partnership, launched early 2023, encourages cross-school collaboration between headteachers for pupils' benefit.
- 4.8. As children transition into young adulthood, the Council has enhanced its support system. 'Care Leaver' was officially added as a protected characteristic to provide further safeguarding. A range of programmes have been delivered addressing key issues like youth violence and increasing skills/opportunities for this cohort. The Council exceeded its target as 97.3% of care leavers were placed in suitable housing last year.
- 4.9. The Council is also taking a proactive leadership role in efforts to reduce delays in the family justice system, which currently sees children involved in care proceedings spend an average 46 weeks navigating the court process - nearly double the 26-week target set by public law. Through the Designated Family Judge Trailblazer Pilot representing 12 boroughs, The Council with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is working to standardise regional approaches and improve data sharing to decrease hearings and divert more cases from court where appropriate.
- 4.10. Building on a strong track record of positive inspections, The Council is continuously working to enhance its services for young people. At the time this report was drafted, Westminster's Youth Offending Service was undergoing its first inspection in over a decade by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, thoroughly preparing a robust presentation of good practices and positive outcomes for the inspection team. This followed two extremely positive Ofsted inspections in recent years for extra-familial harm (2022) and Special educational needs and disabilities support (2020). The Council was also finalising preparations for an anticipated full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) later in 2024, having last received one in 2019 alongside the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham.
- 4.11. Supporting adults facing financial hardship amid the cost-of-living crisis has been a key priority. Westminster's £21 million Cost of Living Fund has provided

comprehensive and vital relief measures. As of February 2024, this included offering free energy and financial advice to over 1,000 households, while the expanded Universal Free Lunch offer provided 14,000 children with a nutritious meal each day. To reduce food insecurity, the Council distributed 7,000 supermarket vouchers to those most in need and created 21,000 holiday activity and meal opportunities for children and young people. The 'Winter in the City' campaign further enabled 67 free warm venues while delivering nearly 10,000 hot meals to residents. Additional funding has been secured for 2024/25 to continue assisting those at risk of financial strain. A new dedicated cost-of-living information hub has also launched, complemented by debt, energy and employment advice services to help households navigate the crisis. As part of this package of support the Council allocated £1.9 million from the Department for Work and Pensions' Household Support Fund, enabling the provision of over £2 million in vouchers for more than 8,500 pupils eligible for Free School Meals during the holidays, as well as £154,000 dedicated to supporting 2,500 vulnerable young people and families in need.

- 4.12. Within adult social care covering, the Council is providing timely assessments and reviews, exceeding targets for evaluating care needs and carer assessments. It reviewed the needs of 94% of carers (caring for an adult), exceeding the target of 92%. Additionally, 95.7% of adult social care service users received an annual assessment or review of their care needs against the target of 95%, and 83% of people have been in receipt of reablement packages that maximize independent living and reduce or eliminate the need for an ongoing care package, compared to the 80% target.
- 4.13. Several initiatives are strengthening Westminster's social care system, including a £500,000 investment in a new mental health community and wellness scheme, alongside £150,000 to implement enablement hubs for adults with learning disabilities and autism. Carer pay has increased by £1.50 per hour above the London Living Wage. Over 90% of care providers hold 'Good' or 'Outstanding' ratings from the Care Quality Commission.
- 4.14. The Council is actively advocating for improved mental health provision by reopening the Gordon Hospital's 51 inpatient psychiatric beds - the borough's only such facility which closed temporarily due to COVID-19. Following a comprehensive review that determined reopening would best meet community needs, The council is now collaborating with the North West London Integrated Care Board to ensure decision-making prioritises maintaining existing services and adapting future proposals based on feedback to deliver high-quality, accessible mental health care.
- 4.15. Underpinning all these efforts has been Westminster City Council's sharp focus on fostering community cohesion and engagement across all ages by leveraging its vital work with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and key stakeholders. The Council launched a £3.3 million investment programme to bolster the City's VCS organisations, including emergency grants for those facing temporary financial crises. By year-end, the Communities Grant Fund had supported 51 groups commencing impactful local projects across 12 wards.
- 4.16. The collaborative Greening Westminster initiative invited ideas from schools, charities and community groups to improve green spaces, awarding £330,000 in funding in 2024. Each successful applicant can apply for up to £50,000 to create new communal green areas for residents.

- 4.17. To reduce health inequalities and enable healthier lifestyles, the £5 million Healthy Communities Fund and £1.8 million budget for cultural projects are making exercise and the arts more accessible Citywide. Positive trends reflect progress, including 4.85 million visits to sports and leisure facilities in 2023 which surpassed pre-pandemic levels, including 3.8 million to leisure centres alone. A new comprehensive Active Westminster Strategy will be launched to further boost participation.
- 4.18. To enhance quality of life and create a safer City, several initiatives were launched. These included the Westminster After Dark programme, which developed an evening and night-time strategy for residents, businesses, and visitors, and the Night Stars volunteer group and Soho Night Hub, which helped ensure safety in the West End's busiest nightlife areas. Library user satisfaction rates also rose significantly to 93% against a 75% target, showcasing the Council's successful efforts to deliver an outstanding experience across physical and digital library services.
- 4.19. The Council recognises the need for continued efforts to achieve better outcomes for children, tackle health inequalities, and support community organisations. The 2024/25 Delivery Plan sets out how the Council is redoubling its efforts through initiatives such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the #2035 programme, which aim to improve access to housing, healthcare, high quality social care services, education and jobs that pay a liveable wage. Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) remains a priority, with the first core funding grants to be awarded in 2024 alongside other initiatives to help the sector grow.

Fairer Housing

- 4.20. Westminster faces a significant housing shortage, with a limited supply of affordable homes and over 10,000 households on the waiting list for social housing. To ease this pressure, the Council has added more than 300 social rent homes to its house-building programme, expanded truly affordable housing in Church Street with 1,120 homes, and delivered 112 sustainable and affordable homes at 300 Harrow Road. Key milestones were reached in various developments over the final quarter of 2023/24, including the Adpar development (which will deliver 20 new affordable Community Supportive Homes by Summer 2024), the Mount Anvil approval as the Joint Venture Partner for Site A of the Church Street regeneration project (providing 429 homes, a new library, garden, and improved market infrastructure), and the Balmoral and Darwin House project (offering 33 Community Supportive Homes at social rent during winter 2024). Notably, in March, the breaking of ground milestone at Westmead was celebrated, with this 100% affordable scheme set to provide 31 intermediate rent and 34 social rent homes, alongside private amenity spaces and enhanced green areas for the broader community.
- 4.21. Improving housing services and increasing resident engagement are top priorities for the Council. To provide better face-to-face access, new Housing Service Centres have been opened across Westminster, with the first launching on Bruckner Street in June 2023, followed by Charlwood Street and Bayswater Children's Centre in February, and an additional centre planned for Broadwick Street in Soho in late summer 2024. Alongside these centres, Housing Services hosts surgeries at Westminster's estates, local Citizens Advice Bureau offices, and Community Supported Housing blocks.
- 4.22. The Council has also prioritised resident consultation, introducing initiatives like the monthly Resident Forum and task and finish groups, allowing residents to shape new

policies and provide feedback on key services like repairs, which will directly influence future service delivery. Efforts were made to identify and engage residents with lived experiences relevant to the consultation topics. This emphasis on resident engagement culminated in a comprehensive public consultation in January 2024 to review Housing Allocation Scheme policies for assessing priority and allocating social housing, receiving overwhelming engagement with over 800 responses, over 40% from individuals on the housing register. The Council also consulted on its first Repairs Policy, outlining service level expectations for residents, receiving over 1,300 responses that will finalise the policy. Additionally, the Customer Advocacy Team has focused on providing tailored support to vulnerable residents with outstanding repairs. This approach is starting to make a difference with tenant satisfaction with the repairs service over the last 12 months rising from 63% in 2022/23 to 66% in 2023/24.

- 4.23. Recognising the importance of preventing homelessness, the Council has supported 690 households to remain in their homes over the past year, an increase from 651 households in the previous year. It also established a £1m Rent Support Fund to assist tenants facing financial difficulties. The increasing demand and cost of temporary accommodation remain significant pressures. To address this, the Council has developed a comprehensive supply plan for 2024/25 aimed at reducing reliance on high-cost accommodation. This plan includes accelerated acquisitions, expanded use of void regeneration stock, and alternative procurement approaches for the private rented sector. Funding has also been allocated to increase frontline capacity and enhance homelessness prevention efforts. Through the Temporary Accommodation Acquisitions Programme, the Council acquired 65 new homes this year and continues to actively seek multiple accommodation sources to meet the high demand. Additionally, improving energy efficiency in existing homes to tackle climate change and reduce costs for residents remains a priority (see 4.13).
- 4.24. In the private rented sector, the Council has maintained a strong focus on improving property standards within the borough. By the end of the year, it had removed almost 400 serious hazards and taken 244 enforcement actions against landlords. Licensing Support Officers have played a crucial role, responding to over 5,000 inquiries from landlords regarding licensing and technical requirements. In line with the commitment to ensure that private landlords operate responsibly, the number of accredited landlords operating in Westminster has risen to 1,391 under the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
- 4.25. Since April 2023, the Council has retrofitted 246 of its least energy-efficient properties, resulting in substantial annual fuel savings estimated at over £50,000 and a reduction of nearly 200 tonnes of carbon emissions per year. The retrofits involved installing wall, floor and loft insulation, secondary glazing work, and in some cases, electric heating systems. This is helping to lower tenants' energy bills, improve the energy efficiency of the Council's properties, and support its wider climate ambitions across the City. In total, 410 properties have been retrofitted since April 2022, supported by a £300,000 grant received in May 2023 from Innovate UK's Net Zero Living: Fast Followers programme. The Department of Energy Security and Net Zero wrote to the Council in April to recognise the good progress it made in delivering the retrofit programme across its properties. Additionally, the Council proposed new planning policies on retrofitting and affordable housing as part of its City Plan review. During the consultation period from 14 March to 9 May 2024, it was proposed that developers must explore retrofitting before demolition, accelerating the upgrade of commercial buildings to meet modern standards, reduce carbon emissions, and help Westminster achieve net-zero by 2040.

- 4.26. Improving frontline housing services, the repairs process, temporary accommodation availability, and housing supply remain key focus areas for the Council. The 2024/25 Delivery Plan sets out aims to strengthen resident interactions, enhance transparency in repairs, secure more temporary accommodation for families, deliver additional affordable homes, develop specialised elderly housing and adapted homes for independent living, while reviewing the Housing Allocations Policy.

Fairer Economy

- 4.27. The Council has delivered strong initiatives this past year to strengthen the local economy and promote inclusive growth by supporting small businesses and creating employment opportunities for all. In June 2023, the Fairer Economy Plan was launched to support small businesses, revitalise local high streets, and increase job opportunities.
- 4.28. Significant efforts were made to upskill residents, facilitate training, and boost employment opportunities over the year. The Westminster Adult Education Service helped over 7,000 gain job skills, while Westminster Works facilitated over 2,000 hospitality and leisure placements and furthermore, helped to fill 487 vacancies and support 407 businesses. Initiatives like City Lions broadened career aspirations for 1,000 teenagers, and Kickstart created 100 youth employment opportunities. Also, the Council recently teamed up with tech giants from across the City to celebrate Westminster's youthful digital talent through the Digital Dash programme, which enabled twenty local youth in North Paddington to work alongside global tech mentors to build digital products addressing local challenges. To bridge the skills-employment gap, the Council established an Education, Employment and Skills Board and expanded the "My Skills Zone" e-learning platform with over 2000 courses to help residents improve their skills. Through the Social Value Programme, Westminster Anchor Alliance, City Lions, and Tech Lions programmes, the Council's commitment to developing local talent and providing local employment opportunities continues.
- 4.29. Supporting local businesses remained a priority. The Westminster Business Unit provided guidance and assistance to over 20,000 small businesses. The Council collaborated closely with local businesses, job providers, and the 18 Business Improvement Districts. Through the Social Value Programme, the Council engaged suppliers and developers, with around 50% of contracts awarded to small or voluntary organisations. The new Supplier Readiness Programme provided hundreds of businesses with support to become successful council bidders. Hundreds of small businesses applied for the "Meanwhile On" project, an opportunity to take over rent-free shops on Oxford Street launched by the Council in partnership with New West End Company (NVEC) in July 2023. The Sustainable City Charter was also launched to build a network of businesses driving progress towards a net-zero carbon City.
- 4.30. Investment is being made across Westminster to improve high streets and neighbourhoods through infrastructure and amenity enhancements. The North Paddington Programme will provide an improved quality of life for residents (particularly for disadvantaged groups), and increased opportunities in the area. The £10m High Streets Programme will start in summer, revitalising areas like Harrow Rd, Praed Street, and Queensway. Public realm improvements on Oxford St and Regent St will deliver a safer, more welcoming environment for residents and visitors. As part of the ongoing work to transform Oxford Street into a world-class destination, the

Council and New West End Company signed a Memorandum of Understanding to secure Oxford Street's status as a premier shopping destination.

- 4.31. Understanding community views is central to the Council's high street and neighbourhood regeneration efforts. Over 6,000 individuals were engaged on improvements to Oxford Street and Regent Street to draw more shoppers and businesses. A Design Review Panel was also established to provide independent, expert, and objective design advice on major development proposals across Westminster. Reflecting the positive impact of these efforts, the latest City Survey revealed that 79% of residents agreed the Council is making their local area a better place to live, with 62% of residents feeling the Council involves them in decisions that affect their local area, demonstrating the value of resident engagement. The Council will continue to seek improvements to the participation rate, especially in areas where major regeneration is planned.
- 4.32. While progress is being made, job opportunities and educational achievement remain unequal across Westminster's wards. The 2024/25 Delivery Plan focuses on creating a skills strategy to better connect education, jobs, and skills training to improve employment chances for residents. It also continues work to revitalise high streets, enhance experiences on Oxford Street and Regent Street, develop an inclusive evening and nighttime plan for the local economy, provide early career programmes for underrepresented groups, and support business growth.

Fairer Environment

- 4.33. Westminster faces significant climate challenges, but the Council's efforts to address this have been recognised by Climate View, a leading climate tech company that helps cities transition to zero-carbon economies, as the strongest response of any single tier council in England. Alongside the Council's Climate Emergency response, it declared an Ecological Emergency last year, recognising the importance of nature in the City. It has committed to protecting wildlife and biodiversity through implementing measures like banning glyphosate use, becoming a 'Pesticide-Free Council', participating in No Mow May to encourage wild habitats, and developing a new Nature/Urban Greening Strategy to update its policies.
- 4.34. To tackle air pollution and emissions, the Council has invested £35 million in improving active travel infrastructure and safety for cycling and walking journeys. These measures include high-quality cycle infrastructure such as new cycle lanes, a thousand new cycle parking spaces, dockless bike parking bays, redesigned dangerous junctions, and "school streets" to create safer routes for children. The Council has also invested £20 million in zero-emission waste trucks to cut noise and air pollution from its fleet. It delivered on its ambition to electrify 50% of its large waste fleet vehicles, with plans to replace more older, polluting vehicles.
- 4.35. In waste management, the Council expanded the food waste recycling programme, and dedicated City Inspectors were deployed to identify and resolve waste issues on the streets. Coupled with increased public participation, this led to a nearly 2% rise in the household recycling rate and diverted over 1,150 tonnes of waste from landfills and incinerators during the year. To further streamline reporting, the Council designed and launched a new online tool and chat assistant in March, through user testing and engagement. This innovative service enables residents to report waste, fly-tipping, graffiti, and animal fouling occurrences in around one minute, making it

one of the first public-facing tools leveraging such technology to deliver a seamless user experience for environmental concerns.

- 4.36. Within its own operations and housing stock, the Council implemented significant carbon reduction measures. These include installing solar panels, renewable energy systems, LED lighting retrofits, and improved insulation across nearly 250 council properties. Collectively, such initiatives helped reduce the Council's emissions by 4% over the past year.
- 4.37. To promote sustainable transportation, the Council reformed parking policies and dramatically expanded its EV charging infrastructure, with Westminster now boasting 2,462 charging points - the most of any UK local authority. The Parking team successfully managed consultations on implementing the Council's City-wide Emission-based Charging Schemes, set to deliver significant progress towards climate commitments and improved kerbside management. The Pay-to-Park scheme launched on April 8th, 2024, while Resident Permit scheme changes follow on June 8th. Moreover, new bookable EV loading bays in key areas such as Victoria Street and Covent Garden will enable EV LGV and HGV drivers to pre-book up to 90 minutes for loading/unloading - a London first. This innovative scheme aims to reduce freight congestion, emissions, and enhance road safety through smarter freight management.
- 4.38. Sustainability has been embedded into planning processes through the "Retrofit First" policy, raising carbon offset prices, creating platforms for sustainable construction, and establishing a Sustainability Team so that green policies are integrated holistically.
- 4.39. The Council actively engages residents on environmental issues through initiatives like the Citizens' Climate Assembly, where residents collaborated with the Council to propose solutions for achieving net-zero emissions. It also collaborates closely with businesses and developers on climate action. Through responsible procurement policies, all suppliers must now establish emissions baselines, report their carbon emissions, and demonstrate active decarbonisation efforts to be selected. Such partnerships aim to build a more climate-resilient Westminster, especially in more vulnerable communities, by furthering work to better handle extreme weather events.
- 4.40. Achieving the Council's net-zero ambitions, particularly for the City, will be a challenge, but it remains committed to this goal. The 2024/25 Delivery Plan outlines actions to continue efforts to reduce its carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency in council properties, for instance through retrofitting. Other efforts include incorporating sustainable drainage systems into public schemes, promoting business sustainability charters, improving air quality via School Streets and enhanced monitoring, encouraging active and sustainable travel by increasing EV charging points, and enhancing cycle routes, as well as supporting community groups in greening local spaces.

Fairer Council

- 4.41. The Council works proactively to ensure it is well governed, ethical, and subject to good fiscal management. While councils across the UK have faced challenging financial constraints, Westminster City Council has maintained a balanced budget through fiscal prudence, despite sector-wide pressures. It has also kept council tax the lowest nationally.

- 4.42. The Council is committed to embedding social value, sustainability, and ethical sourcing across its operations. The Responsible Procurement & Commissioning Strategy ensures these priorities are upheld when commissioning third-party suppliers. Pioneering initiatives like the 'Dirty Money' campaign cracked down on money laundering through efforts such as the Westminster Against Dirty Money Charter, seizing illegal goods, and engaging property owners to reduce illicit sales. Additionally, the Westminster Green Fund successfully raised £1 million in record time for community-led environmental projects.
- 4.43. To enhance service delivery and decision-making, the Council implemented recommendations from a review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, strengthening its governance processes, increasing scrutiny's impact, and supporting evidence-based decisions for residents.
- 4.44. The Council is committed to becoming a more transparent, accessible, and inclusive organisation that better allows residents to hold it accountable. A key indicator of progress is the upward trend in residents feeling well-informed by the Council, currently at 72% according to the City Survey - significantly higher than the 56% national average for local authorities.
- 4.45. Expanding opportunities for active community engagement has been a key focus. The Council has introduced public speaking at Full Council meetings and scheduled more time for public participation in policy and scrutiny meetings. It has also hosted interactive community events, established resident panels and Citizen Assemblies like the recent Westminster After Dark stakeholder assembly. These initiatives allow for valuable resident input on services and policies, complementing year-round engagement efforts across the borough to promote transparency and participatory decision-making.
- 4.46. The Council continuously explores ways to boost community participation. It has ramped up voter registration campaigns, increased community grant funding, and developed more accessible neighbourhood communities. All major consultations are now hosted on a new digital platform called "Common Place", attracting over 7,000 visitors and 4,000 responses across different proposals in 2023/24. The Council has also refreshed its "Report It" service for environmental issues like noise and waste, using AI to streamline reporting with an aim to eventually allow reporting in just 60 seconds. For the first two released for waste and noise 70% of new reports are completed online. Additionally, it established a new Research and Design function, engaging over 1,200 residents and businesses to inform policymaking.
- 4.47. Efforts to increase transparency further include launching a Smart City open data platform that provides open access to council data, as well as establishing an independent Design Review Panel to guide sustainable local development based on resident feedback. A user-friendly Planning Statement tool was also launched to demystify the planning process.
- 4.48. The Council is taking steps to become a more inclusive workplace by achieving Level 3 Disability Confident employer status and conducting an organisation-wide anti-racism review as part of its commitment to being an anti-racist authority. It is also supporting fair wages through the Fair Tax Pledge, Ethical Care Charter, and a £1m investment to increase the hourly rate of pay for homecare workers.

- 4.49. To reinforce the Council's commitments to anti-racism, inclusivity, engagement and transparency, the 2024/25 Delivery Plan aims to increase spending with local and small businesses and VCS organisations, launch a data publishing platform and community participation charter, continue rolling out Commonplace for resident input, and ensure ethical, environmentally conscious procurement. Workforce diversity and representation will also remain a priority, in order to enable the organisation to reflect the communities it serves.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no direct financial implications related to this report and the recommendations herein. Funding of activities set out in the Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan for 2024/25 are subject to established governance for setting the Council's Budget and in-year decision-making and financial approval procedures.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7. Carbon Impact

- 7.1. There are no direct carbon impact implications arising from this report.

8. Equalities Impact

- 8.1. There are no direct equalities impacts arising from this report.

9. Staffing implications

- 9.1. There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

10. Consultation

- 10.1. Not applicable.

11. Background documents

- 11.1 Year-End Corporate Performance Report to Audit and Performance Committee: <https://committees.westminster.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=128&MIId=6474&Ver=4>
- 11.2 2024/25 Delivery Plan: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/delivering-our-plan-build-fairer-westminster>
- 11.3 2023/24 Delivery Plan: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/fairer-westminster-delivery-plan-2023-24>
- 11.4 2022-26 Fairer Westminster Strategy: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/FairerWestminsterStrategy.pdf>

If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the background papers please contact: Mohibur Rahman, Head of Strategy and Performance
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