



Housing, Finance and Corporate Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

Committee date:	9th January 2017
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Please find below an update on key areas of activity from the Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development portfolio since the committee last met.

Housing

1. Church Street Renewal

1.1 Feedback from the recent engagement on the emerging Church Street masterplan is being considered by the masterplanning team and being used to inform their emerging ideas. The masterplanners have been invited to run sessions with local students on the design process and these will happen in early 2017.

1.2 Following a successful consultation on the Green Spine proposals, the design team are now working on the detailed design for the project. The proposed start on site for the project is late 2017.

1.3 Discussions with UKPN have seen them commence their works at Lisson Arches. By late January we anticipate having a confirmed programme for the enabling works, including works to the bridge. Permission has been granted for out of hours working to accelerate progress.

1.4 The Regeneration Base at 99 Church Street continues to attract residents with access to employment support being the main reason for visits.

1.5 The Luton Street development is due to be submitted for planning in the New Year and the developer is meeting regularly with the residents' group to consider their input to the design process.

1.6 Discussions are taking place with the Met Police over them taking a long term void shop on Church Street as a base for their neighbourhood teams serving Westminster. This will bring between 50 -60 police officers and support staff to work in Church Street, secure investment in a property that has proved difficult to let and have an active frontage on to a key part of Church Street. We are discussing how to make the building open and welcoming. This will replace the facility at Paddington Green until new facilities are provided as part of that development.

2. Ebury Bridge

Dialogue with residents in the delivery of new and improved homes at Ebury Bridge continues through on-site meetings; drop in sessions and a regular newsletter. Both Soho Housing blocks have been acquired; and rehousing residents is currently underway. Work continues on developing options for delivery of the project in a way that meets the aspirations of residents.

3. Housing Zone

The Borough Investment Agreement for Lisson Arches has been delayed as GLA resources have been focused on the priorities of the new Mayor. Discussions continue on securing further investment in the Housing Zone from the GLA.

4. Tollgate Gardens

Affinity Sutton has taken possession of the Tollgate Gardens site. Following a recent merger with Circle, Affinity Sutton will now be called Clarion Group. Hoardings and safe access routes are in place for the residents of Tollgate House. The planning application for the re-cladding of Tollgate House was approved on 6th December 2016. Demolition works on the residential blocks has been completed. .

5. Infill programme

As the first phase of sites moves to works start on site a further group of opportunities are being considered. The programme is on track to deliver 25 new homes for rent and 8 units for disposal in the next 12 months.

6. Affordable Housing

6.1 Dolphin Living has taken handover of a new build scheme providing 12 affordable homes at Lanhill Road. Lanhill Road is the second of three schemes that will deliver at total of 50 intermediate rented homes under the Westminster Home Ownership Accelerator. The Accelerator scheme enables tenants to build up an equity stake in home ownership at the end of their 3 year tenancy in an intermediate rented home.

6.2 The Council has successfully completed the transfer of 10 tenanted homes at Wellesley House on the Ebury Bridge Estate from Soho Housing Association. The successful negotiation of the transfer of Wellesley House from Soho follows the earlier transfer of Wainwright House to the Council. These transfers will facilitate the regeneration of the Ebury Bridge Estate.

7. Housing and Planning Act 2016

We are still awaiting regulations to implement the key changes brought in by the 2016 Act. The Government has announced that the policy of charging higher rents to higher earning council tenants, that was due to be implemented in April, is now due to be discretionary rather than mandatory. The Government has also announced that the higher value void levy, expected to start in 2017/18 is to be delayed. Regulations on the phasing out of lifetime tenancies are expected shortly. On starter homes, there are indications that ministers are considering broadening the definition so that instead of an exclusive focus on homes for ownership, it also covers rent-to-buy products. More details are expected in the Housing White Paper in January. The Mayor of London is developing a product of this kind and we are in discussions with the Greater London Authority about this and the potential synergies between it and the Westminster Accelerator that we are delivering in partnership with Dolphin Living. Regulations relating to tackling rogue landlords are expected in late 2017.

8. Homelessness Reduction Bill

8.1 The Homelessness Reduction Bill, which is being taken forward as a Private Members' Bill by Bob Blackman MP, is supported by government. The Government has announced that local authorities will receive reasonable costs to implement the Bill, which is currently at Committee stage. The Bill places heavy emphasis on preventing homelessness and introduces a number of new duties on local authorities including:

- A duty to assess anyone that approaches them as homeless (including single people)
- A duty to prevent homelessness and to develop a personal housing plan with those who present as homeless
- A duty to help secure them accommodation if homelessness cannot be prevented.

8.2 It also redefines when someone is actually considered homeless – although some amendments from government are expected in this area. DCLG is currently working with the Local Government Association to identify the costs of the Bill; we are in touch with them and will be doing our own modelling when there is more information about the approach they will be taking.

9. Mayoral consultations

9.1 The Mayor of London has published two documents for public consultation. The first of these is the draft supplementary planning guidance on Affordable Housing and Viability. This seeks to give guidance on how the Mayor's policies on delivering affordable housing (particularly his "long-term strategic aim of half of new all new homes in London being affordable") can be given effect within the policy framework of the current London Plan. It sets out a recommended approach to development viability including a post-permission "overage" review mechanism. The Mayor has asked for comments by 28th February 2017 and we are currently considering the draft in detail. It is obviously important that any approach is sufficiently flexible to take account of the wide variation in circumstances between different parts of London.

9.2 A draft "Good Practice Guide" to estate regeneration is the second document currently out to public consultation. This sets out what the Mayor considers to be best practice in estate renewal, dealing with the aims and objectives of estate renewal (including the balance between refurbishment and rebuilding, ensuring no loss of affordable housing and improving the local environment); consultation and engagement with residents and ensuring a fair deal for tenants and leaseholders. Comments have been requested by 14 March 2017 and again, we are currently considering the detail of the Mayor's proposals.

10. CityWest Homes (CWH)

10.1 Performance

CWH continued to perform well in Quarter 3 against its Management Agreement targets. Approximately 60 households are now on Universal Credit, and this has resulted in a significant increase in the level of arrears. CWH are working through a plan to offer a range of support to households, including money management appointments via our contract with Westminster CAB, referrals to our employment programme and assistance in making Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications. They have prioritised contact with the existing cases which transitioned to the new benefit cap level in the first instance to ensure they understand the changes to the rent tenants need to pay and support in paying it.

10.2 Intermediate housing service

The Homeownership Westminster Service is currently outsourced and the contract is ending in March 2017. The council has agreed that CWH will deliver this service from April 2017. This will be a minor variation to the existing Management Agreement. Services will include:

- Assessing service users' eligibility for Intermediate Housing schemes
- Providing advice and information about intermediate market opportunities in Westminster, and elsewhere if more appropriate
- Managing the waiting list and access to Intermediate Housing schemes

10.3 Board Recruitment

Following a successful recruitment campaign, CityWest Homes has appointed an independent non-executive director and a resident non-executive director to join the Board with effect from 2nd January 2017. An additional resident non-executive director has been appointed and will join the Board in April 2017 when another vacancy will arise.

10.4 Service Transformation

10.4.1 Work continues on the development of a new service delivery target operating model, supported by a digital programme.

10.4.2 Development of a multichannel contact centre is on track for full implementation in June 2017. A call handling pilot has now been rolled out across all areas. This has resulted in c40% of calls being diverted to the right team, first time.

10.4.3 CWH is working on a joint procurement exercise with the Council to purchase CRM software which the Council aims to pilot in 2017, with the ambition of improving service delivery and giving greater access through direct self-service.

10.4.4 To support the creation of the new target operating model CWH wishes to establish a subsidiary company. The target date for the creation of the new subsidiary company is January/February 2017 with a 'start date' of April 2017. All new staff will be employed by the new company and existing staff will continue on the same terms and conditions within the parent company, CityWest Homes Limited.

10.4.5 The letting of new repairs and major works contracts is on track for phased implementation over the spring and summer of 2017. Tenders have been invited for all seven of the new Term Partnering Contracts and the tender evaluation process commences in January 2017. Staff structures will be realigned early in 2017 to reflect the new contract arrangements

11. Rough Sleeping

11.1 The Rough Sleeping Team received great news in December 2016 of two successful bids. Firstly, their bid to the DCLG to remodel an existing hostel into a short stay assessment centre was successful. The service will be redesigned using leading edge practice, to provide a 'one stop shop' to get newer rough sleepers with complex needs, stabilised, focused and reconnected to their home areas within a maximum 1 month time scale. The quick turnaround time will provide the outreach teams with a much needed resource to reduce numbers on the street.

11.2 Also in December 2016 was an audit of provision of services for female rough sleepers. A comprehensive action plan was devised and will be delivered over the next six month period including remodelling a smaller hostel to focus on the needs of women and working more effectively with couples. Continued funding was also won from the GLA for the female entrenched rough sleeper project targeting older female rough sleepers with mental health needs moving around London boroughs, typically avoiding services. The project funds a dedicated mental health nurse who supports outreach teams to find these women and coordinate a route off the street, critically putting in place the right offer at the right time.

11.3 A bid has been submitted in partnership with the tri borough Violence Against Women and Girls Network to the DCLG for a small night centre providing a dedicated women's 'safe space' for female rough sleepers with complex needs.

Economic Development and Growth

12. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

The Heart of London Business Alliance's (HOLBA) renewal ballots for the occupier BIDs covering the areas of Piccadilly, St James's, Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus have now been agreed by the council. The ballots will be run during February and March 2017 with the results being announced on the 24th March 2017.

13. Westminster Business Unit

The Business Unit continues to progress well since its inception. In excess of 217 enquiries have been handled to date with a resolution rate of 87%. Most common enquiries relate to business advice/support, licensing, business rates, investment and procurement. The unit is currently on track to achieve their annual target of 300 enquiries.

14. Westminster Enterprise Week (WEW) 2016

Westminster Enterprise Week achieved the following outputs with the percentages showing progress against targets:

- Number of young people engaged = 2,879 (288%)
- Number of enterprise learning hours = 3,188 (213%)
- Number of dedicated activities, events or workshops organised = 24 (80%)
- Number of enterprise volunteers engaged = 97 (162%)
- Twitter Reach = 787,000 (157%)

Although the number of events was below target the programme was developed with 30 events but for reasons outside of the Council's control some events were cancelled.

15. Employment

The Westminster Employment Service reports 499 residents have been supported into employment so far this financial year. Of those, 355 were previously long term unemployed, claiming benefits for 12 months or more. Employment Outcomes for long term unemployed residents in 2016/17 are projected to increase by 158% compared with 2015/16. In the 5 year period Feb 2011 to Feb 2016 long term unemployment in Westminster fell by 22%. Compared to 378 Local Authority districts in England, Wales and Scotland, Westminster achieved the 8th highest fall in the numbers of long term unemployed.

16. Broadband

In the last month confirmation has been received that the full business case for the Connect Westminster project has been approved. The £2.8m European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) project will support 1,000 SMEs in getting connected to super and ultrafast broadband through the provision of micro grants.

17. Markets – Berwick Street Market procurement

17.1 On the 25th November, 7 bidders were invited to submit a full tender. Following the weeks commencing the 28th November the Council invited the bidders to meet with the Council to ensure they know what we are expected at the invitation to tender stage and provide the opportunity for them to ask questions.

17.2 The closing date for the receipt of tenders is noon on the 16th January. The tenders will then be evaluated with an expected notification of contract award to follow the week commencing the 20th February 2017. The contract will be awarded in March with the market expected to launch in April 2017.

29th December 2016