



City of Westminster

# Committee Agenda

Title:

**Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting Date:

**Thursday 17th September, 2020**

Time:

**6.00 pm**

Venue:

**Please note that this will be a virtual meeting.**

Members:

**Councillors:**

Gotz Mohindra (Chairman)	Adam Hug
Susie Burbridge	Guthrie McKie
Lorraine Dean	Matt Noble
Murad Gassanly	Emily Payne

**This will be a virtual meeting and members of the public and press are welcome to follow the meeting and listen to discussion to Part 1 of the Agenda.**

**This meeting will be live streamed and recorded. To access the recording after the meeting please revisit the link.**



**If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Officer, Toby Howes, Senior Committee and Governance Officer.**

**Tel: 020 7641 8470; Email: [thowes@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:thowes@westminster.gov.uk)  
Corporate Website: [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)**

**Note for Members:** Members are reminded that Officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and Members are welcome to raise questions in advance of the meeting. With regard to item 2, guidance on declarations of interests is included in the Code of Governance; if Members and Officers have any particular questions they should contact the Head of Committee and Governance Services in advance of the meeting please.

## **AGENDA**

### **PART 1 (IN PUBLIC)**

**1. MEMBERSHIP**

To note any changes to the membership.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive declarations of interest by Members and Officers of any pecuniary Interest or any other significant interest in matters on this agenda.

**3. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR STRATEGY**

**(Pages 3 - 12)**

**4. CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND REGENERATION UPDATE**

**(Pages 13 - 22)**

Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration) to update the Committee on current and forthcoming issues in his portfolio.

**5. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE**

**(Pages 23 - 26)**

Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) to update the Committee on current and forthcoming issues in his portfolio.

**6. WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER**

**(Pages 27 - 32)**

The Work Programme for 2020-2021 and the Action Tracker are attached.

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

To consider any other business which the Chairman considers urgent.



City of Westminster

## Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	17 September 2020
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Private Rented Sector Strategy
<b>Report of:</b>	Annette Acik
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Councillor Heather Acton – Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Licensing  Councillor David Harvey – Cabinet Member for Housing Services (see 2.2)
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	Housing
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	Cecily Herdman <a href="mailto:cherdman@westminster.gov.uk">cherdman@westminster.gov.uk</a>

### 1. Executive Summary

Westminster has not had a dedicated private rented sector strategy before and is developing one in light of new intelligence about the sector. Due to the timing of the committee, and the publication of the draft Strategy, a presentation on it will be given on it at the meeting. The draft Strategy includes a range of proposals to support the PRS, including consulting on introducing an additional licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation. Consultation on it is planned for late September – October 2020 with the final Strategy published in early 2021.

- 1.1 Westminster has the largest private rented sector (PRS) in England, with properties across all wards and it has grown in size over the last decade. It is made up of submarkets and an estimated 14% of properties are occupied by low income households. There is high churn in the PRS and a large proportion is occupied by young people without children, although the number of older people and families has grown over recent years.
- 1.2 While satisfaction with the sector as a whole is generally high, some issues in Westminster's PRS have been identified which the draft Strategy seeks to address. These include some poor conditions and practices in houses in multiple occupation and an unawareness of council services to support

residents amongst some private rented tenants. The committee is asked to comment on the draft Strategy and on the consultation approach.

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

The council is consulting on a new private rented sector (PRS) strategy later in September and the final Strategy will be published early in 2021. Due to the timing of the committee it has not been possible to share the draft Strategy with members, however a presentation on it will be given at the meeting. The draft Strategy includes a range of proposals to support the PRS including one to consult on the introduction of an additional licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation.

2.1 The committee is asked:

1. *Do the proposals help to address some of the issues we are seeing in the private rented sector?*
2. *Should anything else be included?*
3. *If they have any comments on the consultation approach and specifically on how we can seek the views of private tenants?*

2.2 Although the draft PRS Strategy cuts across two Cabinet Member portfolios, it is only being discussed at this committee meeting. The report and any recommendations will however be shared with the committee for Environment, Highways and Public Protection.

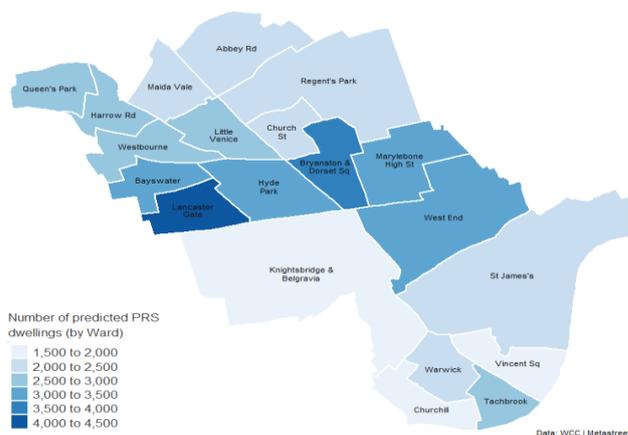
## 3. Background

### 3.1 Overview of Westminster’s private rented sector (PRS)

### 3.2 Size and structure

Westminster has the largest PRS in England with an estimated 52,700 homes which are located in all wards, with the highest concentrations in central and north western areas of the city.

Figure 1: The location of private rented homes



Source: Westminster City Council: Private Rented Sector: Housing Stock Condition and Stressors Report, August 2019

- 3.3 The PRS is made up of submarkets and estimates suggest:
- 14% is occupied by those with incomes of less than £20k<sup>1</sup> including students, workers living in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and people and families receiving housing benefit.
  - 14% is occupied by those with incomes of £90k or more<sup>2</sup> and will include workers with high incomes.
  - 72% is a 'middle income submarket', occupied by 'professionals' that may be flat sharing and some families.

3.4 *Conditions*

Around half of Westminster homes were built before 1850 which increases the risk of them being in poor condition. A 2019 report estimates that 13% of PRS homes (6,773 properties) have a 'Category 1 hazard', which is a slightly lower proportion than the national average. Category 1 hazards can have a serious impact on the health of occupants and include faulty electrical wiring, fire risk, severe damp and mould or an excessively cold property. Westbourne Park, Queen's Park and Harrow Road wards were also found to have the highest number of private rented properties with these hazards<sup>3</sup>.

Table 1: Category 1 hazards in Private Rented Properties

	Westminster		England
	PRS overall	Houses in multiple Occupation	PRS overall
No	6,773	4,178	750,000
%	13%	44%	14%

Source: Westminster City Council: Private Rented Sector: Housing Stock Condition and Stressors Report, August 2019. English Housing Survey Private Rented Sector 2017/18

- 3.5 HMOs have significantly more Category 1 hazards than other PRS homes which means the council often intervenes in their management, to inspect them or to deal with antisocial behaviour. Recent data suggests they are 2.5 times more likely to be the source of anti social than other PRS properties and on average, every HMO receives 2.6 interventions<sup>4</sup>.

3.6 *Rents*

Westminster has some of the highest private rents in London with the cheapest room in a shared house costing around £160 per week.

<sup>1</sup> CACI Westminster household income data 2019

<sup>2</sup> As above

<sup>3</sup> Westminster City Council: Private Rented Sector: Housing Stock Condition and Stressors Report, August 2019

<sup>4</sup> As above

Table 2: Private rents in Westminster per week

	Bedroom size				
	Shared	1	2	3	4
30 <sup>th</sup> percentile	£160	£381	£549	£750	£949
Median		£450	£649	£920	£1200
Upper quartile		£549	£800	£1,294	£1,749
Local Housing Allowance rates					
Central London	£154.194	£295.49	£365.92	£441.86	£593.75

Source: Hometrack June 2020 except for the shared/room rate which is from the Valuation Office

### 3.7 Private tenants

When compared with the overall Westminster population, private tenants are more likely to be<sup>5</sup>:

- **Younger:** 54% are between 25-44, compared with 40% overall. Although they are becoming 'older' - the 2011 Census found only 10% to be in the 45 – 66 age group, which compares with 25% now.
- **In households with no children:** 21% have children in the household compared with 33% overall. Although there are now more families in the PRS as the 2011 Census found only 15% of PRS households to include children
- **In good health:** 95% describe their health in this way compared with 87% across Westminster
- **Working full time:** 61% compared with 50% across Westminster overall
- **Asian:** 24% compared with 20% overall. They are also slightly more likely to have a **Mixed** or **Other** ethnic origin and less likely to describe their ethnic origin as White or Black. Their profile is changing however, as the 2011 Census found 70% of PRS tenants to be White, which compares to 54% now.

3.8 A high proportion of people from overseas are likely to live in Westminster's PRS as London-wide estimates suggest over 80% of migrants in the capital live in the sector<sup>6</sup>. They are likely to be living in all types of private rented homes in Westminster - from high end lets - to HMOs. Population churn in the sector is high with estimates indicating that just 45% of PRS tenants remain in Westminster for more than one year.

3.9 Research in 2012<sup>7</sup> found that 90% of PRS tenants were satisfied with the tenure and that dissatisfaction was mostly amongst tenants claiming housing

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, data on private tenants comes from the council's annual Survey (called the City Survey), used the combined findings from the years 2018 and 2019

<sup>6</sup> [www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Private-Rented-Sector-report.pdf](http://www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Private-Rented-Sector-report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Westminster Private Rented Sector Study 2012: Ecory's

benefit. Although now old, this finding is broadly in line with the English Housing Survey 2017/18, which shows 84% of PRS tenants nationally to be satisfied with the tenure<sup>8</sup>.

3.10 These findings are however likely to mask issues within certain parts of the PRS, for example, a focus group held with Westminster tenants living in HMOs in 2018 found that they had concerns about:

- Affordability and value for money.
- Conditions in communal areas.
- Landlord response times to complaints about condition.
- Placing demands on landlords and fear of eviction.
- Knowing their rights.

3.11 Given the cost of private rents, HMOs are more likely to be occupied by those with lower incomes and fewer housing choices. Increasingly, rooms in HMOs are let on licences rather than assured shorthold tenancies, so the occupants have the least secure form of housing, which can make them more reluctant to complain about conditions or management issues.

3.12 As identified by the council's Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024<sup>9</sup>, research with a small group of people at risk of homelessness in the PRS found a number to be struggling with arrears and poor conditions in their homes. A national report in 2018 found that increasingly private tenants were 'less positive' about the sector<sup>10</sup> and organisations like Generation Rent are campaigning for changes in the PRS<sup>11</sup>.

3.13 *Landlords and lettings agents*

The size of landlord holdings varies. A report in 2012<sup>12</sup> estimated that:

- 47% of landlords owned a single property.
- 21% owned 2 properties.
- 32% owned from 3 properties upwards – with some portfolio landlords owning around 100 properties.

3.14 Landlords owning one property is still likely to be the most common type and the proportion may now be higher as a national report suggests they grew by

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<sup>8</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/817630/EHS\\_2017-18\\_PRS\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817630/EHS_2017-18_PRS_Report.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>

[www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/homelessness\\_strategy\\_final\\_for\\_decision\\_22.5.2020for\\_upload.pdf](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/homelessness_strategy_final_for_decision_22.5.2020for_upload.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Private-Rented-Sector-report.pdf](http://www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Private-Rented-Sector-report.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [www.generationrent.org/about](http://www.generationrent.org/about)

<sup>12</sup> ECORYS, (2012) The Private Rented Sector in the City of Westminster

16% over a ten-year period<sup>13</sup>. Westminster's landlord profile is similar to England's, where 45% of landlords own one property<sup>14</sup>.

3.15 Officers find the 'let to let' practice common in Westminster, particularly in HMOs. This is where a person or company rents a self-contained property and then subdivides it and lets it out on a room by room basis. Often tenants that live in these rooms don't know who their landlord is and the landlord can be hard to identify, which causes problems if the council is involved to address a problem.

3.16 Westminster is reported to have lower rental yields than the London average, with yields ranging from 2.2% - 3.2% per year<sup>15</sup>. However capital appreciation is generally considered to be higher in central London.

3.17 There are known to be 380 lettings agents operating in Westminster and they vary in size, from agents handling only a small number of properties, sometimes with just an online presence, to larger ones with offices and dealing with hundreds of properties.

### 3.18 ***Current activities across the council to support the PRS***

3.19 Activities to address poor conditions include:

- **Running a Housing Standards Task Force** to tackle rogue landlords and agents through the gathering and sharing of intelligence and by using it to coordinate action against the worst offenders. Over twelve months the work of the Task Force led to £200k in fines being issued to HMO landlords operating without a legal licence.
- **Submitting information to and using the London-wide and national rogue landlords data bases** so tenants and other boroughs investigating cases can see if there has been a prosecution or a notice served.
- **Responding to c.1,600 complaints each year.** Assessments are done using the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System which is a risk based tool that helps to identify hazards in the home which can have a detrimental impact on health. If severe hazards (Category 1) are identified the council has a duty to take action against the landlord for them to be removed.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Private-Rented-Sector-report.pdf](http://www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Private-Rented-Sector-report.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-private-landlord-survey-2018-main-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-private-landlord-survey-2018-main-report)

<sup>15</sup> [www.portico.com/yields](http://www.portico.com/yields)

Table 3: Environmental Health interventions 2019/20

Enquiries dealt with about poor conditions	Homes made decent	Category 1 hazards removed	Category 1 fire hazard removed	HMOs improved	Enforcement notices served	Prosecutions /Civil Penalty Notices
1,722	565	592	294	62	404	17

3.20 Activities to ensure good and lawful practices include:

- **Investigating a range of complaints** such as tenants being locked out of their homes, illegal rent increases or threats of illegal eviction. Prosecutions are done in around 2 cases each year, if no alternative remedy can be found.
- **Identifying breaches of consumer protection legislation by lettings agents and taking enforcement action where necessary.** Over twelve months, Trading Standards served 50 notices against 29 agents for breaches. An example of a breach is charging fees to tenants for getting references and for renewing their tenancy which is against the Tenant Fees Act 2019.

3.21 Activities to support private tenants include:

- **Referrals to Safer Renting – a charitable organisation specialising in supporting private tenants.** Referrals are made, for example, when legal action against a landlord is being taken or to help tenants claim rent repayment orders<sup>16</sup>
- **Publicising the Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018** to tenants in our communications with them. The Act enables tenants to take action against landlords themselves if their property doesn't meet certain standards.
- **Providing advice and support to help them stay in their homes,** the Housing Solutions Service negotiates with private landlords that have, or are planning to, serve eviction notices. (To note: the draft Strategy does not cover homelessness from the PRS as this is already addressed in the Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024<sup>17</sup>).
- **Providing information on the website** about rights<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Rent repayment orders enable tenants to claim back rent in certain cases where their landlords have been operating unlawfully

<sup>17</sup> [www.westminster.gov.uk/housing-strategies#homelessness-strategy](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing-strategies#homelessness-strategy)

<sup>18</sup> [www.westminster.gov.uk/assistance-private-tenants-and-leaseholders](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/assistance-private-tenants-and-leaseholders), [www.westminster.gov.uk/private-tenants](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/private-tenants)

### 3.22 Activities to support landlords include:

- **Being part of the London Landlords Accreditation Scheme (LLAS).** To become accredited with LLAS landlords and agents have to take part in training and once accredited are offered continuous professional development. There are c800 accredited landlords in Westminster, which is lower than some other central London boroughs.
- **Holding a regular landlord's/agents forum** to give updates on national or local policy changes, answer questions and understand their issues and concerns.
- **Providing information for HMO landlords on our website<sup>19</sup>.**
- **Providing a range of private sector grants<sup>20</sup>** which landlords can apply for such as decent homes and disabled facilities grants and grants for emergency works to heating and hot water and to make homes safer.

### 3.23 Other activities include:

- **Proactive work with some larger lettings agents** to provide advice about legislation and best practice.
- **Commissioning ad hoc research** into the sector and analysing **wider data** such as the Census and local survey data to help understand private tenants, the services they may need and their experiences of using them.
- **Regularly collecting and analysing data on our interventions into the PRS to improve conditions**, looking at the types of involvement and trends.

## 4. Summary of issues the draft Strategy aims to address

The council does not have a dedicated private rented sector strategy. Its aims towards the sector are in the Housing Strategy Direction of Travel Statement 2015<sup>21</sup> and include continuing to address poor conditions and practices and regularly reviewing the case for discretionary licensing.

### 4.1 A dedicated Strategy is necessary due to the updated intelligence on the sector about conditions and also because it continues to grow in size and as there have been changes in the profile of tenants. Key issues the Strategy aims to address include:

- Poorer conditions in HMOs compared to other parts of the PRS and some dissatisfaction amongst HMO residents and concern about reporting issues.

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<sup>19</sup> [www.westminster.gov.uk/private-tenants](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/private-tenants)

<sup>20</sup> [www.westminster.gov.uk/housing-grants-and-assistance](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing-grants-and-assistance)

<sup>21</sup> [file:///C:/Users/cherdma/Downloads/draft\\_housing\\_strategy\\_direction\\_of\\_travel%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/cherdma/Downloads/draft_housing_strategy_direction_of_travel%20(1).pdf)

- The growing 'let to let practice in HMOs which can compromise standards and make identifying the landlord difficult.
- Unawareness amongst tenants about services to help them if they have problems with their landlord, due to high churn in the PRS and as there are significant numbers of people from overseas and younger tenants in it, that may be less aware of, or less likely to use, council services.
- Lower levels of accredited landlords when compared with some other boroughs.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the  
Background Papers, please contact  
[cherdman@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:cherdman@westminster.gov.uk)**

#### **APPENDICES:**

None

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

A number of background papers are referred to in this report and are included in the footnotes.

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## Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Thursday 17 September 2020</b>
<b>The Report Of:</b>	<b>Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration</b>
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	<b>Gemma Stanton, Cabinet Officer</b> <a href="mailto:gstanton@westminster.gov.uk">gstanton@westminster.gov.uk</a>

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This report seeks to update the committee on matters pertaining to the Finance, Property and Regeneration portfolio focusing on:

1. COVID-19: Response;
2. COVID-19: Re-Opening and Recovery; and
3. Operational Updates.

### **1. COVID-19: RESPONSE**

#### **1.1 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Overall, the Council was able to maintain momentum during lockdown across the Development Programme from early design through construction and sales and completion.

For example, the Development team were able to hold design team meetings virtually thanks to the use of Building Information Modelling and other virtual design technologies, delays to the design phase for projects were kept to the bare minimum.

The team worked closely with the supply chain to ensure that all sites that could safely operate during lock-down did so. As a result, 30% of the sites remained open throughout, with the Delivery team Project Managers visiting the sites and undertaking limited inspections on a weekly basis. Constant dialogue was maintained with all contractors which meant that as soon as the Construction Leadership Council guidance changed, we were able to re-open more sites safely, 100% of the sites were active by 22 May. The methods of working, site operating hours and best practice continues to be reviewed to improve productivity, however most sites are still only able to operate at 70% to 80% production due to the limited amount of labour that can be present on site under current guidance.

We have started on site with new projects at Falkirk House, John Aird Court, Sunderland House and Edinburgh House.

The Development Sales team have been very active throughout the period, they have monitored market conditions and reviewed our product and price carefully throughout. The team have been able to successfully launch the new developments at Carrick Yard (Luton Street) and Venice Court (Parsons North) whilst maintaining market interest and retain purchasers at The Masefield (Beachcroft). The result has been that since 16 March the team has secured 57 offers, 24 of which

have exchanged contracts, bringing the total to 85 reservations and exchanges across the three schemes so far. The value of the offers agreed is just over £79.5million currently, meaning the team have already been able to achieve almost £2.4million above the business plan figures for the sales on these units.

## **1.2 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

Overall, we anticipate that this year will see a significant drop in the level of spend (and capital receipts) compared to budget. This is expected as there have been delays to the programmes in response to Government guidelines. As a result, we are asking officers to look very carefully at the reprofiling of spend as part of the next budgeting review process, both in terms of value and timing.

## **1.3 STRATEGIC FINANCE**

The Commercial and Financial Management team have been working closely with Heads of Service and senior managers on how the impact of COVID-19 and Government restrictions and guidelines affects our sales, fees and charges and other commercial, investment and rental income, as well as the additional cost of responding to the crisis and supporting our communities. This has been reported to all Members through the Period 2 Monitoring Report, which was previously circulated. The Period 4 Monitoring Report will be presented to Council's Audit and Performance Committee later in September, so will be available to all Members to review once papers are published.

## **1.4 REVENUE AND BENEFITS**

As part of the Government's national response to COVID-19, the Council implemented financial assistance to the Borough's claimants with their rent, as well as increasing Council Tax Support awards by up to £150 (applicable in scenarios where a resident was already in receipt of this support but had a remaining Council Tax balance to pay) to schedule.

There were a number of financial support and relief schemes for businesses that were made available in response to COVID-19. For example, the Council was the first local authority in the country to utilise 100% of its initial Government funding allocation of grants for businesses. To date, the Council has paid out 5,570 grants totalling £98million, which has been fully funded by Government.

A Discretionary Grant scheme was also devised to align with the Government's priority areas. This scheme offered 399 grants of £10,000 that were fully funded by Government. The Council received nearly 1500 applications for the 399 grants of £10,000 that were available, and to date 346 grants have been paid, with the remainder due to be paid out by the end of September.

In addition to these schemes, the Council has been administering new applications under the Government's 'Enhanced Retail, Hospitality and Leisure scheme'. This has resulted in nearly £1 billion of relief being awarded, which reduces the annual collectable national non-domestic rates (NNDR) debit from £2.4billion to £1.4billion.

## **1.5 CORPORATE PROPERTY**

The Council's Corporate Property team responded in a number of key areas to address the immediate impact of the pandemic and the resulting lockdown. This included the following:

- The provision of support to services to ensure that their buildings were safely closed down and that security arrangements were in place;
- Ensuring that public conveniences remained open, free to use and kept safe for users;
- Sourcing, storing and distributing 970,250 items of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to front-line staff and care homes;

- Supported the delivery of food (and later hot food) packages to rough sleepers and our Adult Social Care (ASC) locations seven-days a week, amounting to a total of circa 69,000 food deliveries (an average of 860 packages per day);
- Implementing new arrangements to support the directive for staff to work from home, such as the delivery of over 760 office chairs to staff, scanning of incoming post and forwarding to departmental representatives; and
- Converting the 18th floor of City Hall as an operational centre for the Borough Emergency Command Centre (BECC).

### **1.5.1 BUILDING CLOSURES AND MAINTENANCE**

Throughout lockdown, the Corporate Property team maintained the 24-hour operation of City Hall and Lisson Grove and continued to carry out Planned Preventative Maintenance and cleaning as business as usual. The team also carried out weekly unoccupied building checks to meet insurance and statutory compliance for the thirteen libraries within the Facilities Management portfolio.

The Corporate Property team carried out a number of actions to support the operation of our buildings during lockdown. This included the following:

- The implementation of full-time cleaning and security teams at sites that are home to our Libraries, Archives and Registrar Service to manage the social distancing and enhanced cleaning requirements;
- The installation of hand sanitiser units and the provision of hand gels and pedal bins across the Council's Corporate Property estate;
- Supported Community Halls and Regeneration offices with the installation of COVID-19 related signage;
- Assisted with the mobilisation of the "Internet services for Residents" at Church Street Library and Victoria Library; and
- Held weekly meetings with the Council's Corporate Health and Safety teams and our Facilities Management provider, Bouygues, to review our COVID-19 Re-occupancy Programme.

## **1.6 PEOPLE SERVICES**

### **1.6.1 AGILE WORKING**

From the onset of lockdown, the People Services team worked with our Information Technology (IT) team, and other functions, to ensure agile working was effective. As there had been a lot of work put into developing agile working over the past 18 months as part of creating a modern working environment within our people strategy the Westminster Way, this enabled the Council to respond quickly and effectively to working from home. As part of this work, the People Services team have ensured that staff had the resources and equipment to be able to work from home for a sustained period of time. This has included the supply of keyboards and monitors where needed, along with the provision of office chairs to peoples' homes to ensure they can work comfortably and without risk of back pain. The chairs have been particularly welcomed by staff.

There has been a real focus on staff wellbeing from the outset of the pandemic led by the People Services team. This has focused on:

- Ensuring staff have access to COVID-19 testing, with a clear process to follow if symptoms arise;
- Working with Emergency Planning teams to ensure the provision of PPE for front line workers;
- Clear communications on health and wellbeing specifically related to COVID-19, which led to the creation of a dedicated wellbeing page on the Council's intranet site; and
- A deep and committed focus on staff mental health to ensure that all staff were supported and had a number of resources to support them (such as training, wellbeing newsletters, and

ensuring an agile approach to managing annual leave, granting managers discretion on how much paid leave to offer their team members to support them in exceptional circumstances).

## 1.6.2 STAFF REDEPLOYMENT

At the beginning of the pandemic, it was clear that there may have been a need to redeploy staff into front line roles where COVID-19 absence impacted on services ability to maintain activity.

In order to support the Council's response to the pandemic, Westminster Connects was set up to coordinate contact with shielding individuals in the community, required large number of staff to be redeployed from other areas. In addition, staff were required to support the Council's Emergency Response team and other corporate activities, which also required additional staff to help support the Council's response. In total, 134 staff were redeployed to services as part of the Council's response (See Figure 1 for more detail).

As staff were redeployed to different service areas as part of the Council's response, training packages were quickly developed to assist in staff building basic knowledge to be able to undertake the roles they were redeployed to. This was also done for staff who were identified to support ASC in the event of there being staff shortages as contingency (See Figure 2 for examples of some the modules created for ASC).

**FIGURE 1: STAFF REDEPLOYMENT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

Team	Number of staff redeployed
Emergency Response team	17
Westminster Connects Response team	91
Economy team	9
Rough Sleeping team	15
	2
<b>Total number of staff redeployed</b>	<b>134</b>

**FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF TRAINING MODULES MADE AVAILABLE FOR STAFF REDEPLOYED TO ADULT SOCIAL CARE**

- Introduction to Social Care;
- Working in Residential and Home Care;
- Working in Information and Advice for Adult Social Care;
- Working in Hospital Discharge;
- Introduction to Adult Social Care;
- Practical Guidance for working with those affected by dementia;
- Autism: Understanding the Facts;
- Safeguarding Adults for Non-Adult Services; and
- Dementia Friends Awareness.

## 2. COVID-19: RE-OPENING AND RECOVERY

### 2.1 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Council continues to work on its Housing Development Programme and sees this as critical for the recovery and regeneration of Westminster.

As part of our recovery process, procurement opportunities across the programme have been brought forward, with some major contract awards achieved (such as the Ebury Bridge Design and Build contract, and the Lanark Road Contract Award).

In addition, the Development team are actively exploring the potential acceleration of delivery across the programme and have explored on site facilities and flexibilities around extended working hours with local communities and the planning department to enable a recovery of programme and socially distant working, particularly with various trades during fit out. This will feed into the Contractor Purchasing System Review 2020 process.

## **2.2 STRATEGIC FINANCE**

The Council is monitoring the recovery of activity and the financial implication and forecasts for services such as, but not limited to, parking, commercial waste, and roads management income. The Finance team are challenging the assumptions and assessing the impact on the medium-term financial plans as part of this process. It is inevitable that COVID-19 will have implications for the Council's budget for 2021/2022, which will become clearer over the coming months and clarified as part of the budget setting process.

An update on how the Council's financial position has been impacted by COVID-19 will be outlined in the Council's Period 4 Monitoring Report, which as aforementioned, will be made available to all Members upon publication of Committee papers for the upcoming Audit and Performance Committee later in September.

## **2.3 REVENUE AND BENEFITS**

The Council recognises the financial hardship that residents and businesses have faced as a result of the lockdown and the Government's nationwide response to COVID-19. As a result, we have adopted a sympathetic approach to sundry debt collection. This included suspending all debt collection activities to 1 June 2020, and slowly recommencing by issuing reminders, although legal action remains suspended. In addition, customers are being encouraged to co-operate to resolve debts, with requests for longer term repayment plans being sympathetically treated.

The Council is also currently drafting a proposal to address a major increase in NNDR Hardship applications due to the pandemic. In 2019/20 the Council received 34 Hardship claims, however, to date in 2020/21 the Council has received 564 applications. As part of this process, the Council's Business and Enterprise team have assisted the Council's Revenue and Benefit's by offering appointments to each business to provide advice, as well as assess if each business has exhausted all other financial avenues. We hope to have a policy and process in place in the coming weeks.

## **2.4 TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

For the foreseeable future, the ultra-low global interest rates will have an effect on the Council's Treasury investment yield as money market rates near zero, coupled with the possibility that interest rates may venture into negative territory in future years.

The Treasury team have continued to monitor the Council's cash flows to help plan future requirements and exploring future borrowing opportunities to ensure best possible long-term funding on future capital expenditure. Alongside this, the team have been maintaining large liquid balances in accessible accounts to cover unforeseen demands on cash.

## **2.5 CORPORATE PROPERTY**

The Corporate Property team have adopted the voluntary Government Code of Practice for commercial relationships during the pandemic. It encourages tenants to continue to pay their rent in full, if they are in a position to do so, and advises that others should pay when they can. It acknowledges that landlords should provide support to businesses if they are able to do so. This Government Code of Practice specifically mentions that where grants have been provided, the support should be used to help meet the costs of maintaining their businesses and saving jobs, including rent.

However, there have been instances, where the Council has provided financial assistance to its commercial tenants. For example, for those commercial tenants that were forced to close their premises due to Government guidance, a rent-free period for the March 2020 quarter, was granted.

## **2.6 PEOPLE SERVICES**

The People Services team have worked with the Corporate Property team to ensure appropriate social distancing and a safe working environment in our offices is provided for staff, which has been informed by detailed risk assessments. There is currently a maximum of 315 workspaces at City Hall and approximately 60 workspaces at Lisson Grove for staff wishing to return to the office.

## **3. OPERATIONAL UPDATES**

### **3.1 REGENERATION PROGRAMMES**

#### **3.1.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

To support our Regeneration and Development programmes, the Community Engagement team have reshaped our public consultation activities utilising online promotion, interaction and consultation methods in addition to a greater use of letter drops which has proved effective.

For example, through the use of digital media and tailored engagement, the Ebury Bridge pre-planning consultation, which took place during lockdown in May, saw a significant increase in responses from residents in the local area. This was achieved through the use of accessible online platforms, tailored written materials and telephone calls. In total the second-round consultation saw a 36% increase in responses from the first round held in November 2019.

For the final round of consultation on Balmoral, the new approach combining digital, online and telephone engagement tools, reached more than three times as many residents compared with our last round of public engagement. Using just the phone, we reached 85% of target households and held meaningful conversations, including dozens of translated calls that allowed us to speak to residents in their native languages, reaching those 'hard to reach' households that had not engaged previously. Over the course of this consultation, we reached an estimated 320 residents, bringing the total number of residents engaged throughout the year-long consultation period to over 500.

At Westmead, our online consultation hub was especially effective, with nearly 800 unique page views during the consultation period and four times as much written feedback via the digital survey than we received previously. Overall, we reached an estimated ten times as many residents, and noted a marked improvement in the quality of engagement, with residents asking detailed questions and engaging in a more substantial way.

For the first round of engagement on Carlton Dene, the new approach allowed us to reach almost 200 residents over the month-long consultation period. Using the phone, webinars and other digital methods, we recorded detailed feedback and over 75% of residents were positive about the proposals. By speaking with residents in more detail, we also gained useful insight into the kind of information they want to see at the second round, planned to launch on 28 September.

#### **3.1.2 EBURY BRIDGE**

In July the planning application for the renewal of the Ebury Bridge estate was submitted to the Local Planning Authority at Westminster. This significant milestone followed over two years of collaborative working with residents of the estate and people living in the local area. The application was formed in two parts, a detailed application for two buildings to be built in Phase One of the scheme and an outline application of the remaining buildings across the estate. It is anticipated that a Planning Committee will decide the application before the end of 2020.

In the meantime, the contractors working on site have continued the enabling work at pace. In total, five separate contractors delivered work on the Ebury Bridge scheme throughout the lockdown period. The work on the empty blocks at Wainwright, Wellersley, Hillersden, Dalton and Mercer are very close to completion and preparatory work on the footings is now underway.

The test wells, drilled to investigate a sustainable underground energy source, have been completed and the results from this analysis have now been collated. The project team have been able to confirm that a Ground Source Heat pump system using water from 100 metres below the estate can deliver a heating and hot water solution for the new development. This type of innovative system is becoming more common in residential developments with Nine Elms and Chelsea Barracks employing this technology. Ebury Bridge is however one of the first local authority led developments to put in place Ground Source Heat pumps in the route towards zero carbon neighbourhoods.

As empty blocks are removed opportunities arise for temporary uses and exciting projects, including the Ebury Edge Meanwhile Use, which is a set of timber units has risen from the ground where the Edgson House block once stood. The units will be used to incubate fledgling local businesses bringing both interest and vivacity to the local economy. The scheme will be supplemented by a new community café, workspaces, a community centre and a central events space and shared communal growing plot. Ebury Edge is scheduled for completion in early October with the new operators establishing their businesses ready to open to the public.

The Council has committed to take forward the delivery of Phase One of the Ebury Bridge renewal scheme itself. This work would commence in 2021, should planning permission be granted by the Local Planning Authority. To ensure the Council identifies the most appropriate delivery routes for subsequent phases of the scheme, constructive engagement with the housing investment market is being carried out. This has involved dialogue with a number of organisations with a particular focus on the market rent element of the scheme. The feedback the team receives from the potential investment partners will inform recommendations for approval around November 2020.

### **3.1.3 CHURCH STREET**

The continued decant of Site A is vitally important to the success of the Church Street programme; however, the wellbeing, health and safety of all Church Street residents has and will continue to be the Council's highest priority. Therefore, in accordance with Government guidance, all planned Site A tenant moves to the new development, Lyons Place, were postponed in March 2020 to protect tenants. Similarly, all planned moves from Lambourne House were placed on hold. All tenants were contacted by a dedicated officer from the Relocations team and kept updated throughout the lockdown period, and were contacted again in June 2020, once Government guidance was revised, to assess whether they were happy to move. To date, 25 tenants from Site A have moved to Lyons Place, and a further 14 tenants from the Community Support block, Lambourne House, have decanted from the site.

Similarly, the Council has continued to maintain contact with Site A leaseholders throughout the pandemic, particularly in cases where a leaseholder had accepted an offer by the Council. Due to social distancing restrictions, valuations and property surveys were postponed, to protect the wellbeing of both Council staff and residents. Again, only once the Government guidelines were revised, did any physical visits resume.

In January 2020, the Council wrote to all businesses occupying Site A to notify them of the regeneration works. Due to the pandemic, a decision was agreed that the Council would postpone further action on this matter, and instead Property Services engaged with businesses to offer them financial and advisory support. Now restrictions have relaxed, the Council have instructed Savills to

commence contact with these commercial leaseholders to continue with the programme's vacant possession objectives.

In September, the Council plans to hold an engagement session to receive feedback from the public on the completed Stage Two designs for Phase One of the Triangle project ahead of submitting a planning application at the end of September 2020.

### **3.1.3.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHURCH STREET**

Recently, the Create Church Street Fund was launched via the Crowdfund Westminster platform. The fund has made £150,000 in funding available for residents and groups who want to run arts and creative projects in the Church Street area. This has enabled us to channel that fantastic community spirit to support local Church Street projects that will help residents get back on their feet, learn new skills and care for their local environment. There will be additional support and advice to groups who might be trying crowdfunding for the first time.

This September the Neighbourhood Keepers (NK) Programme is launching Round Seven of the programme funding. The Programme is targeted at the local population with participants from a diverse group with 73% of participants identified as Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME), demonstrating that the programme is impacting a diverse range of individuals in line with the demographics of the Church Street ward. An average of 69% of participants were female meaning that nearly 50% of all participants were both female and BAME, traditionally one of the hardest to reach groups in our society. For this latest round there is a particular emphasis to fund projects which seek to have a higher number of young project leaders as younger residents can go unnoticed as their education, work and health circumstances have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. This work has also been supplemented by a series of youth focused employment and training webinars which have been well attended by young people over the summer period as this cohort seek to make plans about their future.

The NK Programme also delivers environmental benefits for all Church Street residents as part of a holistic, socially focused approach which places people at the heart of the substantial regeneration programme. To date the programme has delivered 18 environmental projects which include gardening and growing. The team are working to increase the number of gardening and environmental projects, particularly considering the recent relaunch of the Green Spine public realm project and the Council's Zero Carbon Strategy. This will enable teams across the Council to work closely to ensure further opportunities to co-create these much-needed environmental projects can be achieved.

### **3.1.4 HARROW ROAD**

The Harrow Road team has continued to progress the developments at 300 Harrow Road (Warwick Community Hall) and the Rebel Business School with minor delays due to delayed planning decisions, furloughed building contractors and fewer staff being allowed on site to meet social distancing requirements.

FM Conway are currently on site preparing the site for the temporary nursery into which we will decant the existing London Early Years Foundation Harrow Road Nursery in order to start the main build.

The Harrow Road team have also worked with the Public Health team to commission 'SWIM' to do some targeted outreach at Maida Hill Market, Westbourne and Queens Park to engage local people around safety measures around COVID-19.

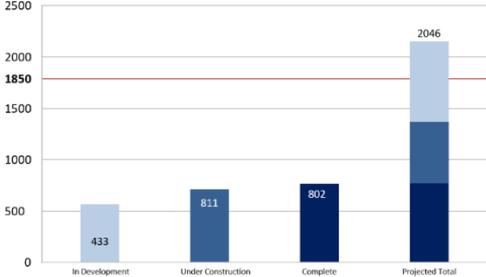
In addition to this, the team have been prioritising our digital interventions, ensuring connectivity to broadband, digital skills for local businesses to trade online, enhancement and access to outdoor

green spaces and outdoor shopping in the markets to enable local people to continue to be safe during the pandemic.

**3.2 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Through our Affordable Homes Programme, the Council remains set to deliver over 2,000 homes between 2017/18 and 2022/23, exceeding our initial target of delivering 1,850 homes (See Figure 4). In addition, we anticipate the delivery of around 2,300 homes between 2023/24 to 2029/30 (See Figure 5).

**FIGURE 4: DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOMES (2017/18 to 2022/23)**



**FIGURE 5: PROJECTED DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOMES (2023/24 TO 2029/30)**

Future Pipeline: 2023/24 – 2029/30	
Social	1,147
Intermediate	270
Private	930
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,347</b>

The Development team have worked closely with the Planning Department, which has resulted in consent being granted for 300 Harrow Road, Torrison House and Glastonbury House since March 2020. A submission has also been made for the Adpar Street development, with Westmead and Balmoral expected to be submitted by the end of September.

**3.4 REVENUE AND BENEFITS**

As of the end of July, the collection rate for both Council Tax and NNDR was considerably down on the same point last year (See Figure 6). The current national economic issues resulting from the pandemic are obviously a key factor. However, the collection rate is also affected by the fact that the Magistrates Courts are still locked down in relation to debt recovery, which means that no local authority can seek Liability Orders to allow their normal recovery processes for 2020/21 debts.

Due to the size of the NNDR collectable annual debt, the current collection rate figures are concerning. However, the loss to the Council will be mitigated by the safety net provided by the Business Rate Retention Scheme, which should limit the Council’s loss to a maximum of around £7million. In addition, the Government’s recent decision relating to the upfront payment of Section 31 payments, has reduced the possible future risk surrounding cashflows for the Council.

**FIGURE 6: COUNCIL TAX AND NNDR COLLECTION (2020 AND 2019)**

	End of July 2020	End of July 2019
<b>Council Tax</b>	43.3%	47.0%
<b>NNDR</b>	34.7%	42.9%

**3.5 CORPORATE PROPERTY**

The Corporate Property team have continued to progress on projects across the Council’s estate, meaning the Council is in a position to report updates on milestones for the following projects:

- In mid-September, the Council’s new care home, Beachcroft, will be handed over from the developer to begin fitting out ahead of occupation in October. The new care home will comprise of 84 en-suite bedrooms. The development also included 31 private residential flats within the new scheme, which will be managed by Masfield;

- By the end of September 2020, the Corporate Property team intends to invite to tender documentation to go to market following planning consent for the Coroners Court extension;
- In October 2020, the installation of fire doors and other remedial fire compartmentation works at Athlone House are due to be complete;
- The Portman Children’s Hub extension and refurbishment has now reached the construction phase and is expected to be complete by June 2021;
- The refurbishment of 215 Lisson Grove remains in progress and is expected to be completed in December 2020;
- Invitation to tender documents for the building condition surveys of the Council’s libraries and leisure centres are due back by the end of September, which will inform the Council’s Maintenance Strategy and programme for the next five years; and
- The early completion of normally intrusive works to a range of Council buildings that have been closed due to the pandemic. The works included Asbestos removal works, Lift condition surveys, Asbestos Lift Shaft surveys, and lift insurance inspections across the estate.

In addition to these milestones, the Council has recently completed a transaction deal on 9 Woodfield Road, which will include the development, and re-provision of a new Street Cleansing Depot, as well as other public realm facilities.

### 3.6 PEOPLE SERVICES

For Quarter 1, the Council has good progress in a number of our key metrics, such as:

- Staff Turnover has reduced to 11% when compared to Quarter 4, which was recorded at 15.6%;
- 44% of staff in our Band 5 or above positions identify as women, an increase when compared to Quarter 4, which was recorded at 41%;
- 16% of staff in our Band 5 or above positions identify as BAME, an increase when compared to Quarter 4, which was recorded at 14%; and
- Sick absence amongst staff has reduced to 0.9% when compared to Quarter 4, which was recorded at 1.8%. The People Services team believe this reduction is due to people working from home during lockdown and being able to work, albeit not feeling 100%.

The Council’s recruitment has also gone well over the past few months, and we have made good progress on Positive Action and getting more BAME candidates to apply and be appointed into Band 4 and above roles (See Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7: RECRUITMENT OF BAME CANDIDATES SINCE APRIL 2020**

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 54% of all received applications identify as BAME.</li> <li>• 53% of all shortlisted applicants identify as BAME.</li> <li>• 47% of band 4 and above closed vacancies successfully filled by an identified BAME applicant.</li> </ul> |
|--|



City of Westminster

Housing, Finance, and Regeneration Policy and  
Scrutiny Committee

## Cabinet Member Report

<b>Committee date:</b>	<b>17 September 2020</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	<b>Councillor David Harvey</b>
<b>Portfolio:</b>	<b>Housing Services</b>
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	<b>Amy Just</b> <b><u><a href="mailto:ajust@westminster.gov.uk">ajust@westminster.gov.uk</a></u></b>

### 1. Communications

Residents have been kept updated and informed of service updates and advice as coronavirus lockdown restrictions have lifted, with information on government guidance, how to access council support and any changes to services. Digital tactics have increased, enabling faster and more efficient communications such as utilising email where we have addresses and text message. In addition to our fortnightly e-newsletters and quarterly magazine, most recent communications to highlight include:

- Supported the gradual restart of non-urgent repairs, and major works onsite, with letters, pamphlets and posters on noticeboards in blocks
- New online FAQ for the latest coronavirus advice and information relating to housing services plus new Public Health posters on all noticeboards
- 17 web news posts covering issues such as noise nuisance, cycles stores, financial and employment support and fire safety from June to August, with local media coverage in WestminsterExtra on major works restarting at Little Venice Tower
- Launched MyWestminsterHousing online customer account upgrades to report, view and cancel repairs, with improved online FAQ and emails to existing users
- Transformed the Tenant Handbook with printable and online interactive versions available
- Transformed the Leaseholder Handbook with printable and online interactive versions available, and produced a Your Lease Explained video for leaseholders and promoted on our website and through our YourHome e-zine and magazine
- Information and advice to 1,000 residents living in community supportive housing to reassure them of measures in place to keep them safe
- Notice to 3,000+ housing applicants to advise allocations are operating as normal, with choice-based lettings available, from 24 August 2020 with new virtual viewing and sign up

### 2. Housing Contact Centre

The contact centre continues to operate remotely with no impact on effectiveness. A reduction in call volumes was seen in April and May but volumes have now returned to normal for the time of year. Performance levels have remained strong with 96% calls handled and 85% of calls answered within 30 seconds for the period of April-July.

Customer satisfaction, empathy and engagement levels are above 90%, based on surveys of over 2000 customers.

### **3. General Repairs**

The repairs service was reduced to emergencies and health and safety works only during lockdown and recommenced on a phased basis from June with plumbing and electrical works. Further trades will be added as pre-COVID work in progress is cleared. This approach has allowed contractors to take staff off furlough to clear the works put on hold at the start of lockdown and manage a gradually increasing new workload. The re-start has been accompanied by resident consultation and communications. Repairs requested before lockdown will be completed in October, subject to access.

Repairs performance has been good across the reduced service with both customer satisfaction with the service and satisfaction with the quality of the repair up slightly on last year.

### **4. Health and Safety Compliance**

Statutory testing and inspections of services including gas appliances, water tanks, asbestos and fire risk assessments continued throughout lockdown, with staff taking additional health and safety precautions as appropriate.

Gas servicing performance has slipped and at the end of July 118 tenanted properties were without a current gas safety certificate. This is due to residents who continue to shield being reluctant to allow access to their homes. A concerted effort is being made by housing management and repairs teams to reassure residents of the safety precautions that are taken to protect all involved but some residents remain cautious.

### **5. Major works**

Planned major works were put on hold during lockdown and spend is reduced accordingly. Work has commenced again, with the support of communications to residents to address the queries they may have about the safety of the works restarting. A small number of queries have been received and the cautious approach has been received well.

### **6. Neighbourhood services**

Neighbourhood services responded swiftly to lockdown to maintain visibility of the service in new ways. Resident meetings are now held on Zoom, including fortnightly meetings with resident representatives and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services. This has helped to ensure the service remains close to its customers and alert to local issues.

The Housing Area Service Centres continue to offer appointment-based services and measures have been taken to ensure that the offices and interview rooms are COVID-Secure. This includes screened receptions and resident interview rooms, reduced office capacity and new hygiene measures. Fewer residents are requesting face to face services and many are cautious about inviting officers and contractors into their homes.

The housing management teams have identified and contacted vulnerable residents, and provided regular contact and support as needed.

The Antisocial behaviour service has seen a 34% increase in reported cases from March to July compared with the same period last year. 60% of cases related to noise nuisance and verbal abuse and 17% of cases concern substance misuse and dealing. Despite the increase in volume, customer satisfaction levels are rising and reached 70% in July.

Estate cleaning has continued with the frequency of some tasks amended, such as touch points in communal areas (handrails, door handles and lift panels). Satisfaction with estate cleaning remains high with both tenants and lessees.

## **7. Rent Collection**

Rent collection performance is running at 96.23% compared with 98.72% at July 2019. Standard rent collection was paused until the end of July 2020. The approach remains support-focused, and payment reminders are not referencing court or evictions. The Government's ban on evictions is in place for six months and new six-month notice periods are to be in place until at least 31 March 2021.

The number of tenants claiming Universal Credit (UC), has increased 40% since January and there is a 5 week wait for the first payment in arrears.

The programme of support includes referrals to employment services and signposting to the Citizens Advice Bureau and other external agencies. Over 400 residents who are looking for work have been referred to the Council's employment services.

Work continues to promote Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to a targeted audience working in conjunction with colleagues in the housing benefit service.

## **8. Leasehold service charge collection**

Lessee service charge collection performance remains good and an increase in arrears on the portfolio is yet to be identified.

The service charge team are monitoring all service charge accounts and keeping a log of any references to COVID19 which may impact on our leaseholder's ability to pay their service charge. No standard debt recovery action is being taken at this time. Payment reminders are being sent with an emphasis on support and assistance.

## **9. Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)**

All TMOs are running full repairs, cleaning and gardening services and have started to reopen their offices. TMO staff are working between office and home and offering face to face services with appropriate systems in place to maintain social distancing.

TMOs are planning their Annual General meetings and receiving support to hold virtual meetings, or to ensure the appropriate risk assessments are in place.

## **10. Registered Providers.**

Registered providers (RPs) are offering services in a similar way to the Council, with many staff working remotely from home. Public facing offices remain closed or with restricted access. Services

such as repairs and lettings are returning to business as usual, with new practices to minimise the risk of COVID19.

RP websites are being regularly updated to inform residents of operating arrangements. RPs are operating welfare calls for vulnerable residents and some are also carrying out food deliveries, working with local charities and volunteer groups.

### **11. Homelessness and Housing Needs**

The Passage (Singles Assessment Hub) has now re-opened with amended procedures e.g. at least one member of the team is on site during the day. The majority of staff across the service continue to work from home with a skeleton service operating from Bruckner Street which is open for all emergency homelessness cases. Footfall remains low, with 18 visitors/appointments during June/July 2020 and 8 in April/May 2020. The contact centre is operating as normal and customers are advised to contact the service via telephone or by going online to complete the online assessment form.

Since 1st April 2020 186 lettings have been achieved, compared with 311 during the same period for 2019. 40% of lettings during lockdown were to homeless households and 18% to Pathways/Hostel Move-On applicants to free accommodation for rough sleepers.

Council stock lettings are taking place with the benefit of a new digital lettings process, including virtual viewings and electronic signup to minimise contact.

The housing service has worked with the Rough Sleeping team and provider agencies to support the shared objectives of protecting those clients in COVID-19 emergency accommodation from future homelessness and achieving a sustained reduction in rough sleeping overall.

Homeless approaches during June and July 2020 were 1.3% less than the same period in 2019/20, with homeless applications down 33.5%. Temporary accommodation placements were down 56.9% compared with the same period in 2019/20. The Council faces continued challenges in trying to secure an adequate supply of temporary accommodation. It is anticipated that demand will increase, particularly from single people when limitations on evictions are raised.

June 2020 saw an increase in the number and of homeless applications with issues of domestic abuse (16% of all homeless applications). This has reduced slightly post lockdown to 13% in July and 8% in August. Customers who approach with concerns of domestic abuse are able to speak with an independent advisor. HSS and our own housing management services continue to work with our DA charity partners to ensure the most appropriate options and support are offered.



## Housing Finance and Regeneration Policy & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	17 September 2020
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	<b>2020/21 Work Programme and Action Tracker</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Ezra Wallace, Director of Policy and Projects
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration and Cabinet Member for Housing Services
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	All
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	<b>Lizzie Barrett x 3103</b> <b>ebarrett@westminster.gov.uk</b>

### 1. Executive Summary

1. This report asks the committee to agree topics for the 2020/21 work programme and note the committee's action tracker.

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

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Review and approve the draft list of suggested items (appendix 1) and prioritise where required.
- Note the action tracker (appendix 2).

### 3. Topic selection

- 3.1 The proposed list of topics (appendix 1) has been compiled by policy and scrutiny officers in collaboration with the services.

**If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the background papers, please contact Lizzie Barrett.**

**[ebarrett@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:ebarrett@westminster.gov.uk)**

**APPENDICES:**

**Appendix 1 – Master Work Programme 2020/21**

**Appendix 2 - Action Tracker**

**WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021**  
**Housing Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

<b>ROUND TWO</b> <b>17 September 2020</b>		
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Private Rented Sector Strategy	Review and provide feedback on proposed Private Rented Sector strategy.	

<b>ROUND THREE</b> <b>16 November 2020</b>		
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor David Harvey, Cabinet Member for Housing
Green financing	Review the council's green investment strategy.	

<b>ROUND FOUR</b> <b>3 February 2021</b>		
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Affordable homes	Review progress of council's affordable housing programme.	
Financial inclusion (including roll out of universal credit)	Review Westminster's approach to financial inclusion, particularly in light of the roll out of universal credit and hardships caused by COVID-19.	

**ROUND FIVE  
10 March 2021**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor David Harvey, Cabinet Member for Housing
Major regeneration programmes	To review major regeneration programmes.	

**ROUND SIX  
29 April 2021**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Cabinet Member Q&A	To update the committee on key areas of work within its remit and the Cabinet Member's priorities	Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration
Temporary accommodation strategy	Review temporary accommodation strategy.	
Homelessness strategy	Review homelessness strategy.	

**ADDITIONAL/UNALLOCATED ITEMS  
2020/21**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Oxford Street Programme	To review progress of Oxford Street Programme.	
Housing management services	To receive an update on housing management services following transition an in-house service and how services were managed over lockdown.	
Anti-social Behaviour on council estates	Review new Anti-Social Behavior (ASB) strategy within Westminster's housing service.	
Housing Revenue Account Business Plan	To review HRA business plan	
Impact of Building Safety Bill		

**ACTION TRACKER 2020/21**  
**Housing, Finance and Reeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

<b>ROUND ONE</b> <b>21 MAY 2020</b>		
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>
Cabinet Member Q&A – Cabinet Member for Housing Services	Share figures on repair rates including feedback from residents on the service.	Completed
	Provide an update on work to remove/replace cladding.	Completed

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