



City of Westminster

# Committee Agenda

Title: **Community Services, Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting Date: **Monday 14th September, 2020**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Venue: **This is a virtual meeting**

Members: **Councillors:**

Karen Scarborough (Chairman)	Eoghain Murphy
Richard Elcho	Geoff Barraclough
Christabel Flight	Andrea Mann
Lindsey Hall	Hamza Taouzzale

**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, Artemis Kassi, Senior Committee and Governance Officer.**

**akassi@westminster.gov.uk; 07810 754991**  
**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.

To elect a Deputy Chairman for the meeting.

#### **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. MINUTES**

To approve the minutes of the Community Services, Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee on 8 June 2020

**(Pages 5 - 10)**

#### **4. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES AND DIGITAL**

The Cabinet Member will be present to answer any questions from the committee.

**(Pages 11 - 34)**

#### **5. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS AND PLANNING**

**(Pages 35 - 48)**

#### **6. WESTMINSTER CONNECTS**

Report from the Executive Director, Growth Planning & Housing

**(Pages 49 - 88)**

#### **7. CONTACT CENTRE PERFORMANCE AND UPDATE**

Report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources

**(Pages 89 - 96)**

#### **8. 2020-2021 WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER**

Report of the Director of Policy and Projects

**(Pages 97 - 104)**

**Stuart Love**  
**Chief Executive**  
**4 September 2020**



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

## **MINUTES**

Community Services, Business and Planning Policy & Scrutiny Committee

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the Community Services, Business and Planning Policy & Scrutiny Committee held on **Monday 8 June, 2020 at 6:30pm.**

**Members Present:** Councillors – Karen Scarborough (Chairman), Geoff Barraclough, Richard Elcho, Lyndsey Hall, Andrea Mann, Eoghain Murphy and Hamza Taouzzale.

**Also Present:** Councillor Matthew Green (Cabinet Member for Business & Planning) and Councillor Paul Swaddle (Cabinet Member for Community Services & Digital).

#### **1 MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.1 There were no changes to Membership.
- 1.2 It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Eoghain Murphy be appointed as Deputy Chair for the meeting.
- 1.3 **RESOLVED:** That Councillor Eoghain Murphy be appointed Deputy Chair of this meeting of the Community Services, Business & Planning Policy & Scrutiny Committee.

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 2.1 No declarations of interest on items on the agenda were made.

#### **3 MINUTES**

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2020 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

#### **4 CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES & DIGITAL UPDATE**

- 4.1 Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE (Cabinet Member for Community Services & Digital) provided a verbal update on current and forthcoming issues in his portfolio, and responded to questions from Members. Recent months had been a busy time for all teams within the City Council, and the Cabinet Member

thanked all of the staff within his portfolio for the work they had done, and for stepping up to support other departments during the Covid-19 crisis and in connection with the recovery response.

- 4.2 A single information hub had been established on the City Council's website in response to Covid-19, which had been constantly updated as the pandemic progressed. The website had seen a significant increase in traffic, with 1.2m unique visitors between March and June. The Committee noted that as part of the social media campaign, two Facebook Live sessions had been staged with the Leader of the Council, with the first attracting over 1500 visits. The viewing figures for the sessions had been 13 times the average for local authority events of this kind and had shown good engagement. The Westminster Connects Service had also been launched, and sought to attract volunteers and coordinate them with people who were shielding, in self-isolation, or were vulnerable and needed help. As the country entered the recovery stage, the City Council was providing additional information to connect businesses and residents.
- 4.3 Westminster Connects was currently supported by over 3,200 registered volunteers, of which 2797 had been deployed to deliver nearly 36,000 needs which had included shopping and befriending. The Committee highlighted the need for the service to continue once the pandemic had ended and noted that Connects would now migrate into voluntary sector responsibilities and service other residents' needs. Although it was hoped that there would not be a second wave of Covid-19, Connects would be in a position to be reinstated with an immediate response if needed.
- 4.4 The Committee commended Connects for their work and noted that the service was being mainly run by staff taken from within existing budgets. £15,000 had been made available to fund a shopping service, in which volunteers used pre-credited cards to buy shopping which service users paid for after it had been received. Although £7,000 had so far been repaid, it was not anticipated that all the money would be recovered. An update would be provided at the next meeting in September, when more data would be available.
- 4.5 The Committee also discussed eligibility for the Connects Service and noted that needs were self-identified by residents who needed support. Individual cases of need could also be assessed if applicants had not been considered eligible.
- 4.6 The Library Service had closed on 23 March in line with government guidelines, but had continued to offer virtual services, which included information, e-books, and sessions through social media. Since Libraries had reopened on 2 April 1200 customers had used internet and computer services, with social distancing being maintained through the provision of time-limited sessions. It was anticipated that libraries would re-open on 4 July, subject to government guidance.
- 4.7 The Committee also commended the work of the Active Westminster Physical Activity Leisure & Sport team (PALS) during the pandemic. All of Westminster's seven Leisure Centres had closed on 20 March, while Parks had remained open. Since the lockdown began, over 300,000 people had visited the

Paddington Recreation Ground: with 20,000 people visiting over the Bank Holiday. The recent warm weather had also created a demand on recently re-opened sports and court facilities; although some of the courts and gardens had to be shut when some of the visitors had failed to observe social distancing.

- 4.8 As many residents did not have access to open space, the Committee recognised the importance of keeping parks open until guidance on re-opening facilities was received. Committee Members also highlighted the importance of smaller parks within estates, and the Cabinet Member agreed to provide further information of future plans for Play Streets.
- 4.9 The City Council's business was being done differently in response to the Covid-19 lockdown. Staff had been working from home, and virtual Committee meetings had been held online and made available on the City Council's website. Public involvement and representations in Planning and Licensing Committees were also being maintained through the virtual meetings.
- 4.10 The Committee also discussed the role of the City Council in Westminster's foodbanks, together with their current location at three temporary sites. The Cabinet Member considered that their location at multi-use sites could serve communities better, and agreed to provide details of the support being provided by Westminster.
- 4.11 Other issues discussed included Ward Budgets; the Westminster City Lions online; progress in connectivity; and making cultural activities more accessible.
- 4.12 The Committee thanked Cllr Swaddle and the Council Officers within his portfolio for their work in establishing the Westminster Connects Service.

## **5. CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS AND PLANNING UPDATE**

- 5.1 Councillor Matthew Green (Cabinet Member for Business & Planning) provided a verbal update on current and forthcoming issues in his portfolio and responded to questions from Members.
- 5.2 The Planning Service had continued to function effectively online, with officers working remotely and virtual Planning Committees being streamed on the City Council's website with good viewing figures. Although site visits had been slowed down by the lack of access to properties, consideration was being given to how visits could be safely reactivated.
- 5.3 The City Plan had been submitted to the Secretary of State in November and was now in the examination phase which would include a public hearing. Although all public hearings had been postponed in response to the pandemic, it was hoped they would reconvene in October, which would enable the City Plan to be adopted by the end of the year or early 2021 at the latest.
- 5.4 Although a number of Place Shaping schemes had not moved forward due to staff mostly being redeployed to work on highways and support the response to Covid-19, Public Realm projects had continued to be delivered across Westminster with work being done responsibly.

- 5.5 In addition to the creation of Westminster Connects, a further positive of the pandemic had been the redefinition of the way the City Council worked with its partners and with businesses. Consultation with businesses on the support they needed to re-open had led to the first phase of the Movement Strategy, in which 5 miles of barriers and cones had been installed across Westminster to allow pavements to be extended so people could move about safely. Businesses were also playing an active role in discussions on how the City and its hospitality industries could re-open; and the City Council was lobbying the Government to enable local authorities to make temporary changes to licences, which would enable premises to have a greater number of tables and chairs outside.
- 5.6 As Westminster entered the recovery stage from Covid-19, measures were being taken to support businesses with additional information that would connect them with residents. The City Council had recognised that the recovery would be resident led, so had launched the Shop Local Campaign on its website which included an interactive map for residents showing which shops and business were open and trading. The Committee noted that over 250 businesses had registered with Shop Local, and Members were asked to urge their local businesses to provide details of their services.
- 5.7 The Westminster Business Unit had received over 2000 enquiries since the beginning of March, and the team had been given additional support by staff being redeployed from other areas such as the library service. Advice on queueing provided by the Business Unit in support of the re-opening strategy had been shared country wide as best practice; and work with the Public Protection and Licensing services to produce guidelines for the re-opening of non-essential businesses and hospitality services was ongoing. Non-essential retail units were also returning to Westminster's markets, with 60 properly socially distanced managed stalls trading again at Church Street.
- 5.8 Although the Government had introduced a scheme of Small Business Grants for businesses across the country, the City Council had been disappointed with the qualifying threshold of rateable value needing to be less than £51,000, which only represented a small percentage of businesses in Westminster. The Leader of the City Council had asked that the threshold be extended, but this had not been taken up. Westminster had been the first local authority to launch the Small Business Grants scheme which had a closing date for applications of 11 June, and it was hoped that grants would be awarded by 25 June. The Committee noted that although £4 million had been allocated to the City Council in discretionary funding for businesses that had not been eligible for the grants, this had been less than was hoped for.
- 5.9 The Committee discussed the City Council's Movement Strategy and highlighted the importance of balancing the needs of business with residents. Committee Members also highlighted that need of maintaining parking facilities for shoppers, and for consultation with residents and campaign groups to protect residential amenity.
- 5.10 The Committee noted the contribution made by the Westminster Employment Service in supporting rough sleepers and providing them with hotel and hostel

accommodation during the pandemic, and in supporting residents and BAME communities back into work.

- 5.11 The City Council had also continued to stage the pop-up Business School, with the latest sessions being adapted to the Covid-19 crisis. The sessions had been held fully online with the two-week course focusing on business resilience and adaptation. The Committee noted that demand had been high, with one of the programmes having been attended by 250 people.
- 5.12 The Committee commented on the reduced levels of pollution in Westminster during the lockdown and sought assurance that this would be a post-Covid opportunity rather than a temporary effect. Committee Members also highlighted the need for the City Council to work more closely with developers on the construction and use of buildings, in order to achieve the objective of a climate neutral Westminster by 2040. The Cabinet Member suggested that pollution could be further reduced, and air quality improved by coordinating trade and commercial waste vehicles.
- 5.13 The Committee commented on the importance of the cultural sector, which was a major source of income in Westminster, and highlighted the need to support associated businesses that would reopen at the same time as theatres.
- 5.14 Other issues discussed included government discussion on deregulating the planning system and the need to maintain the obligation for developers to provide affordable housing and encouraging retail businesses in Harrow Road and Church Street. The Committee also discussed the need for people to be retrained in response to a post-Covid shift in business; linking up businesses with the caring community; and removing racist and discriminatory comments made online in connection with planning applications.

## **6. 2019-20 WORK PROGRAMME**

- 6.1 The Committee discussed its future Work Programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year, together with agenda items for its next meetings on 14 September 2020 and 1 February 2021.
- 6.2 The Committee noted that following the recent restructure of the City Council's Policy & Scrutiny Committees, the Oxford Street Project review now fell within the remit of the Housing, Finance & Regeneration Policy & Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.3 **RESOLVED that:**
- (1) The next meeting of the Committee on 14 September would focus on the City Plan and on Westminster's continued response to Covid-19. The Cabinet Member for Community Services & Digital would be invited to attend; with a written update being requested from the Cabinet Member for Business & Planning. Other items for the September meeting would be Westminster's Contact Centres; the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy including Westminster Connects; and Libraries and the response to the report of the Libraries Task Group at present and going forward;

- (2) The agenda for the following meeting on 1 February 2021 would include a further update on the City Plan and the ongoing viability of designated development sites, together with an update on the Westminster Employment Service. The Cabinet Member for Business & Planning would be invited to attend; with a written update being requested from the Cabinet Member for Community Services & Digital. Consideration would also be given to including a review of the Create Church Street project; the further development of the Westminster Connect service; and the impact of Covid-19 on the future of the Arts Industry in the West End, together with the businesses that relied on that industry; and
- (3) Members be invited to suggest other issues that could be considered for the Committee's future work programme

## **7. COVID19**

- 7.1 The Committee wished to formally record its thanks to Cabinet Members, Council Officers and volunteers for their ongoing help and support for Westminster's residents and visitors; and in providing encouragement and support to aid the economic recovery of Westminster's businesses following Covid-19.

The Meeting ended at 8.42pm

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_



## Community Services, Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	14 September 2020
<b>Title:</b>	Update from Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	Gemma Stanton, Cabinet Officer <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 Community Services and Digital portfolio focusing on:

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

For the attention of the committee, Cabinet responsibility for Libraries, Archives and Registrars has transferred to the Children's Services portfolio; therefore, all updates on this service will be covered by Councillor Barnes as the Cabinet Member responsible.

Appendix:

- Cabinet Member response to recommendations of the Access to Culture Task Group

## 1. COVID-19 RESPONSE

### 1.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORT (PALS)

In line with guidance issued by national government in response to COVID-19, the Council's leisure provider, Everyone Active, closed all seven of our leisure centres on Friday 20 March 2020. The nation-wide lockdown and the closure of our leisure centres and community sports facilities presented a real challenge in encouraging our residents to be active; however, the Council was able to progress and adapt our ActiveWestminster digital transformation programme, OpenActive, to provide support to our residents to be active at home, which aligned with the national campaign by Sport England, #StayInWorkOut.

Our ActiveWestminster digital programme, OpenActive, came out of our ActiveWestminster Strategy 2018-2022 and our commitment to maximising the potential of digital technology to promote timely and relevant opportunities for physical activity, leisure and sport. There are two main ways for residents to utilise digital technology to be more active; this includes self-directed activity, such as walking, cycling or watching a pre-recorded exercise class, or 'live' and directed, such as live streaming an exercise class. There are lots of solutions for residents to find pre-recorded exercise classes, such as online via

YouTube, which works well for a proportion of our residents; however, we consider live-streaming exercise classes is the best way to:

- create motivation and sustained activity because there is a variety of offerings every day and happening at a specific time;
- foster community spirit and collaboration to reduce feelings of isolation as you are virtually in a class with other people; and
- support local fitness business to continue delivering to the population when they otherwise would not be able to.

There have been two critical aspects to our adapted OpenActive project; this included delivering guidance to fitness providers in Westminster who deliver high quality, openly published live exercise classes online, and upgrading the front-end user experience (UX) for both our ActiveWestminster website and app to support virtual exercise classes.

Getting and staying active is vital to everyone's physical and mental wellbeing and we wanted to ensure we were able to continue to support our residents to be able to find and access opportunities to get and stay active but from the comfort of their own homes, in local parks and open spaces throughout national lockdown whilst our leisure centres and community sports facilities were closed.

Our partners, imin and Playwaze, worked with us to produce a simple guide to help fitness providers to start live-streaming exercise classes. All live-streaming exercise classes hosted by our ActiveWestminster partners are available through both our ActiveWestminster website and ActiveWestminster app with a wide offering for our residents suited to their needs, such as activities for children, adults, people with disabilities, and over-50s.

The Council also collaborated with our partner Sport England on their national campaign #StayInWorkOut launched to inspire and inform the public about the many fun, innovative and creative ways the nation can get and stay active. This campaign was supported through our social media channels as a way to share information with our residents on hints, tips and home-based physical activity inspiration whilst in lockdown.

Throughout lockdown, Paddington Recreation Ground remained open to ensure this highly valued community asset could be used by residents to get outdoors and maintain active lives. Between 1 April 2020 to 31 July 2020, 738,955 visitors accessed Paddington Recreation Ground, an increase of 15% from the same period in 2019. Whilst open, there have been officers on the ground to ensure that users were following national guidelines, such as maintaining 2-metre social distancing.

At Sayers Croft whilst the facilities were closed to visitors, the resident team continued to work throughout lockdown supporting schools with booked activity visits and continuing with the refurbishment plan of buildings and the climbing tower, as well as updating educational resources. All work which would have been carried out by external companies has been carried out in-house. The Education team at Sayers Croft have provided online resources for children and families to participate in at home throughout the pandemic.

Our School Games Officer (SGO) has also kept in touch with Headteachers during lockdown and through to the end of term in July, informing them of School Games national and regional plans. In the absence of young people attending school our SGO has shared information to Headteachers from a range of agencies providing virtual online offers including London Youth Games virtual competition, as well as sharing details of local opportunities as lockdown was eased.

In addition to this, in response to national government guidance, the PALS team led the deployment of signage that informed residents and visitors on facility closures and reminding them to maintain social distancing. Signage was deployed across our seven leisure centres, over 170 playgrounds, multi-use

games areas, outdoor gyms, sports courts and pitches, table tennis tables and other communal recreation areas across the borough.

## **1.2 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)**

### **1.2.1 WESTMINSTER CONNECTS**

The pandemic placed an unexpected pressure on the voluntary and community sector as residents were shielding, self-isolating, or were vulnerable due to the lack of wider support networks. Westminster Connects was established rapidly as part of the Council's response to COVID-19.

The Government required that councils to check in with residents that were shielding once a month to assess their ongoing needs and ensure that they are safe. Around 10,000 residents were identified by the NHS as shielding in the borough and a group of re-deployed council staff and volunteers were tasked with providing this service. We provided support to these residents via food urgent food requests, shopping services, social contact or medication collection and delivery. We contacted the residents by letter, text and phone call to make sure everyone knew what support was available and set up the Westminster Connects helpline to make it easy for residents to get help.

The key aim of Westminster Connects was to connect residents with the right support, predominantly provided by volunteers who were registered and managed by the Council. We had a fantastic response from residents wishing to give up their time and volunteer to support our most vulnerable residents, with over 3,300 residents registering to volunteer for Westminster Connects.

Westminster Connects also helped direct donations and offers of support from local businesses and residents to other voluntary and community organisations, such as North Paddington Foodbank and Westminster Foodbank. The service also helped set up a wide range of other projects, such as the Unity Kitchen food project to provide food for the homeless and young people. The Council set up a Food Network Group to coordinate the work to support residents with food and meal delivery, a shopping service, and the Community Intelligence Forum to support voluntary community sector (VCS) organisations.

During lockdown from March until the end of June, Westminster Connects met over 40,900 needs of our residents through the support and generosity of our volunteers and local businesses.

In June the Westminster Connects service transitioned to a longer-term operation model, which enabled the Council to maintain its support network for both shielded and non-shielded residents for the remainder of lockdown. As part of this transition, the helpline moved from being run by council staff to becoming part of the Agilisys telephony service. The helpline move was seamless, and no issues occurred. We maintained a team of redeployed staff until the end of July, which was the end of the self-isolating period for residents who were shielding.

From August we have developed threshold plans for Westminster Connects and shielding, which would enable us to scale up the service in the event of a local increase in the cases of coronavirus. In addition, we have been developing the volunteer service with a wider range of opportunities as part of the rebranding of Westminster Connects into an ongoing volunteer force to support the needs of the community.

## **1.3 CULTURE**

Cultural and creative organisations found themselves within one of the worst hit sectors impacted by COVID-19, having experienced a catastrophic loss of income due to venue closures and a severe drop in production during lockdown. The Council has sought to provide reassurance to the sector that it has support at this unprecedented time.

In mid-May, the Council contacted over 500 local arts, education, community organisations and policy stakeholders to signpost organisations to emergency resources available from different bodies and expressing the council's commitment to supporting the recovery. We also regularly communicated with the Culture Network on funding and information updates, such as the latest national government rescue funding details.

From June, the Leader hosted a series of video conference calls with key cultural stakeholders to provide a forum to hear from the sector about the pressing issues they are facing, and to ascertain how the Council might offer support, for instance, through its Movement Strategy and changes to the public realm to encourage visitors to return to cultural districts.

The Council also communicated the difficulties faced by Westminster's arts sector to counterparts at the Greater London Authority and London Councils in monthly zoom meetings to help them develop their response and lobby national government for support.

In addition to this work, a virtual West End LIVE took place on the weekend of 18 June through collaborative working between the Council's Events team and the Society of London Theatre. This was free to access and was promoted across internal and external platforms to engage over 200,000 people, ensuring that London theatre remains on the radar despite theatres not yet being ready to open.

### **1.3.1 CITY LIONS**

City Lions were quick to respond to the changing needs that COVID-19 brought upon us. By 20 March, the team had redesigned the programme to be delivered online.

Since the start of lockdown, we have delivered eighteen live weekly sessions, four three-day holiday programmes (each running for five-hours a day), and a City Lions Digital Festival with over 24 events and activities engaging almost 300 young people. This has meant that we have continued to offer high quality relevant services for our young people despite being in lockdown.

We have also delivered eighteen weekly creative challenges for our young people, with a prize of £25 for each challenge, which was kindly donated by one of our local entrepreneurs.

## **1.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

### **1.4.1 OPEN FORUM**

As concerns surrounding COVID-19 were high, the Council made the decision to cancel the Open Forum event scheduled for 16 March 2020, due to health and safety concerns related to COVID-19. Whilst the event was cancelled, all pre-submitted questions were responded to and residents appeared satisfied with this.

As an alternative to our Open Forums, we did host two Leader Live sessions on Facebook during lockdown. The first Leader Live took place on 17 April and attracted 585 live views, and a total of 48 questions asked during the live event. This was the first Facebook Live event for the Council and

garnered thirteen times the average view time than an average video on the Council's Facebook page. The first event also received 75 times more shares, and 657 times more comments compared to usual. After the event, the stream was uploaded to the Council website and YouTube. The second Leader Live took place on 29 May and attracted 353 live views, and a total of 49 questions asked during the event. These events proved very popular with our residents as we saw more engagement on this platform compared to other forums carried out previously.

During lockdown and following the success of the Leader Live events, scoping work took place to host a future Open Forum virtually. We endeavour host this online Open Forum in late September or early October.

#### **1.4.2 WARD BUDGETS**

The pandemic did not significantly affect the ward budget programme as we did not see an increase or decrease in applications throughout lockdown. There were a number of COVID-19 specific projects funded by ward members during lockdown; an example of the COVID-19 specific projects supported by ward budgets included:

- Ebury Food Surplus and Thamesbank Centre
- North Paddington Foodbank
- All Sing! Community Choir to enable them to continue online;
- Hot food provision at Maida Hill Place;
- Paddington Waterways and Maida Vale Society to provide relief to local residents; and
- Covent Garden Food Bank.

### **1.5 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

#### **1.5.1 CUSTOMER SERVICES**

In response to the pandemic the Council entered a fast-paced, agile, multi-phase approach to surface important information quickly on all key platforms.

As part of the wider communications mix, it was vital that the Westminster City Council website formed a central bank of up-to-the-minute, reliable information.

The first phase of the website response focused on a single information hub, sign-posted from the homepage and banners across the site. As the amount of information grew, and more data became available showing how users were navigating the site and what they were searching for, we moved into new structures to host COVID-19 updates. This centered around hubs for businesses and residents, and over time these became increasingly streamlined to ease navigation, with most service-specific updates moving out to service pages.

Traffic to the Council website rose by 18% in the first three months of the pandemic from mid-March to mid-June, compared to the previous three months. In total, between March and the start of June, the website had over 1,260,000 unique visitors.

We also developed two new map pages at speed for Westminster Connects and Shop Local. The Westminster Connects map page was created for visitors to identify volunteers and those needing help. The Shop Local map page was created to support the local business community by drawing visitors to their premises by highlighting their opening times and services.

For the first time ever, we held two Facebook Live events with the Leader, giving people the chance to ask Councillor Robathan questions and have them answered either in the moment or through swift

follow-up from officers. These events were popular and saw record levels of engagement on the corporate Facebook account as mentioned earlier in the report.

We also ensured updates were posted on social media multiple times a day, and the team managed a long-term significant influx of questions and comments from the public via our corporate platforms, particularly on Twitter.

Throughout lockdown, tailored, daily email updates via the MyWestminster e-newsletter were sent directly to people's inboxes every day including weekends. These received praise from multiple recipients, even Money Saving Expert, Martin Lewis.

### **1.5.2 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CABINET MEMBERS**

As part of the Council's response to the pandemic, the IT team worked on delivering priority digital projects with services and other Cabinet Members, with support from the Community Services and Digital portfolio. These priority projects included:

- The delivery of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to store details of vulnerable residents who may require additional support services;
- The creation of a sign-up process to allow prospective social housing tenants to view available properties and maintain social distancing;
- The provision of a solution to allow residents to request our shopping support service; and  
The delivery of web and mobile applications to support a service managing the logistics processes for moving the deceased from hospitals within London to temporary excess storage facilities around the capital was completed in April.

In addition, the following priority projects to support our response continue to progress:

- The creation of a virtual library website to enhance our library service offering;
- The provision of an online resident parking permit application and renewal form; and
- The introduced of Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) support for vulnerable residents.

### **1.5.3 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)**

At the start of lockdown, the majority of Council staff had IT equipment, such as a Microsoft Surface Pro, allowing them to access all IT services from home. This facilitated a relatively easy switch to home working. The IT team also carried out rapid upgrades on the virtual private network (VPN) and central internet capacity to support the surge in remote working. Alongside this, IT support processes were redesigned to operate in a mainly remote-only mode, such as delivery and set-up of new and replacement IT equipment to staff in their homes.

We have seen a significant increase in the use of Microsoft Teams for conferencing and collaboration by Council staff with members also making use of this facility to carry out Council business. For example, by June 2020 we saw an increase of around 25 times the use we saw in February earlier this year.

As part of the Council's response to the pandemic, Council Committee Meetings were moved online using the Microsoft Teams Live platform. The move to allow Council Committee meetings to take place virtually has meant that the Council has been able to continue to move forward with licensing and planning applications, appoint a new Lord Mayor, and allow for the democratic functions of the Council to continue with live streaming Cabinet and Policy and Scrutiny Committees. For example, in May, we hosted our first Full Council meeting virtually and appointed our new Lord Mayor, Councillor Glanz. We had over 150 viewers tuned in to this meeting, which is significantly more than usual for our Council meetings.

In addition, the team has upgraded our audio-visual equipment in meeting rooms at City Hall to better support virtual meeting on Microsoft Teams, as well as hybrid meetings whereby there will be some attendees in the meeting room, with others joining remotely on Microsoft Teams.

#### **1.5.4 TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

During March 2020, our Agilisys contact centre experienced no significant change in call volume as users sought information and support in response to the pandemic. However, in April and May, we saw call volumes reduce significantly as some services were temporarily closed as officers were redeployed in response to the pandemic. From June onwards, the volume of calls answered increased to near normal levels. We consider this increase in volume to be due in part to the transition of the phonenumber for Westminster Connects to our in-hour contact centre service with Agilisys, as well as the re-opening of some of the Council's services in line with national government guidance.

#### **1.6 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY**

The critical nature of broadband infrastructure was demonstrated by the increase in data usage during lockdown. Some providers have observed an 80% increase in data traffic during lockdown which demonstrates the importance of fast reliable broadband to cope with this increase demand.

Street works in Westminster continued with a business as usual approach during lockdown with operatives on worksites adhering to social distancing guidelines and wearing additional safety equipment, such as face masks. Broadband and fibre installation works have continued to agreed programmes across Westminster, with GNetwork accounting for the majority of the planned works in this area. To help mitigate the impact to residents working from home, there was a city-wide rollout of acoustic noise barriers across all of their sites, which has allowed works to continue while keeping noise disturbance to a minimum. The opportunity was also taken to complete installations in more complex locations, while traffic volumes were at lower levels, with Regent Street and Piccadilly being of particular note.

In addition, Children's Services identified a number of families that lacked a broadband connection, which was an essential requirement for their continued participation in education during lockdown. In response to this, the Economy team worked with a mobile operator and broadband providers to source Mi-Fi, wireless mobile broadband routers and fibre connections for these families. As a result of this project, an additional five families in Westminster had access to broadband connections to help them maintain contact with their social worker and participate in education.

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

### **2.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORTS (PALS)**

#### **2.1.1 LEISURE CENTRES**

Following the revision in national government guidance to allow leisure centres to reopen from 25 July, Everyone Active and the Council worked together to ensure we were able to reopen our leisure centres safely and to the high standards our community expect.

On 1 August 2020, all seven of our leisure centres re-opened with a phased re-introduction of our service provision over August. For example, on 1 August, our gym facilities were open and from 5 August we offered bookable lane swimming sessions over hourly slots.

Protocols and safety measures were in place to provide a COVID-secure environment for re-opening for staff, residents and customers. During lockdown, ahead of reopening, each facility was deep cleaned. The protocols and safety measures introduced by Everyone Active ahead of re-opening were made available online and on signage throughout our leisure centres. For reference, the safety measures introduced by Everyone Active are:

- We ask that anyone feeling ill or showing signs of any symptoms does not attend the centre and follow NHS guidance;
- Ensuring our cleaning measures adhere to Public Health England guidance;
- All activities will have maximum numbers allocated;
- We will look to implement a one-way system (where possible) so we can maintain social distancing guidelines in all areas of our centres;
- Hand sanitiser and cleaning materials will be located at various locations around the building for customers to use;
- All customer communication can be done through this website to avoid interaction, but where this may be unavoidable, we have installed protective 'sneeze screens';
- We will provide training for all team members on our new way of operating, ensuring both member and team safety is always a priority;
- Most activities will be booked online or via the Everyone Active app prior to visiting the building;
- We will increase our cleaning of the centre and have reviewed our procedures to ensure they meet the COVID 19 'Public Health England COVID 19: Cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance'. You will see additional focused cleaning of any shared surfaces and regular antivirus fogging machines throughout the day; and
- Remind both colleagues and customers of Government advice through clear notices around our centres.

These safety measures remain in place at all seven of our leisure centres and Everyone Active continues to encourage users to book ahead of their visit either online or through the app to ensure the restricted capacity is safely managed.

As part of the re-opening process the team have worked towards the Right Directions 'Fit for Business' independent certification. This is a new accreditation produced by nationwide Quest auditors, Right Directions, as a mark of confidence that leisure facilities with the certification have taken measures to ensure they are compliant with government COVID-19 guidance.

Since re-opening, leisure centres have seen a positive return of users, with extremely positive feedback concerning the new measures and safety procedures that have been introduced.

## **2.1.2 ACTIVESTREETS PROGRAMME**

The Council has accelerated our ActiveStreets programme to safely support the easing of lockdown and to provide a new additional space for children and families to get out and be active. As part of this programme, we have introduced several semi-permanent 'Play Streets' temporary road closures for 'Street Play' sessions, and temporary 'School Streets'. This aspect of our accelerated roll-out of our ActiveStreets programme is a temporary measure that will be continually monitored in order to reflect the safety and needs of our local communities.

The semi-permanent 'Play Streets' are operational on weekdays from 3pm to sunset, and on weekends from 10am to sunset until the 30 September 2020 at the following locations:

- Chepstow Place – between Dawson Place and Pembridge Place;
- Fernhead Road – between Kennet Road and Maid Hill market;
- Northumberland Place – between Talbot Road and Artesian Road;

- Ranelagh Road – between Lupus Street and Johnson’s Place (cul-de-sac);
- Oliphant Street – between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue;
- Peach Road – between Oliphant Street and Ilbert Street;
- Marne Street – between Fifth Avenue and Third Avenue; and
- Kilravock Street – between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue.

The temporary ‘Street Play’ sessions were arranged to take place at the following locations:

- Droop Street – between Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue – on weekdays from 1pm – 4pm until 30 August 2020 with support from ‘Street Makers’ from the Avenues Youth Project; and
- Old Pye Street – between Abbey Orchard/Perkins Rents and St Annes Street – on Wednesday 29 July, Wednesday 5 August, Wednesday 12 August, and Friday 14 August from 1pm until 5:30pm with support from ‘Street Makers’ from St Andrew’s Youth Club.

The temporary ‘School Streets’ have been assessed and selected to be in place from 1 June until the end of term in December 2020 on Mondays and Fridays during term time. During days and times of operation, the following streets will be closed to vehicles, except for access for residents, deliveries and emergency services:

- Bridgeman Street from 8:30am to 9:15am and from 3pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending Barrow Hill Juniors;
- Droop Street from 8:30am to 10am and from 12:45pm to 2:15pm to support pupils attending Queen’s Park Primary School;
- Shrewsbury Road from 8:30am to 10am and from 2:15pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending St Mary’s of the Angel Catholic Primary School;
- Marlborough Hill from 8:30am to 9:30am and from 1:15pm to 2:15pm to support pupils attending George Elliot Primary School;
- Lower Belgrave Street from 8:30am to 10am and from 3pm to 4:30pm to support pupils attending St Peter’s Eaton Square Church of England Primary School;
- Crompton Street from 8:30am to 10am and from 1:30pm to 3pm to support pupils attending the younger year site at King Solomon Academy;
- Drury Lane from 8:30am to 9:45am and from 2:15pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending St Clement Danes Church of England Primary School;
- Essendine Road from 8:30am to 9:45am and from 11:15am to 12:45pm to support pupils attending Essendine Primary School;
- Forset Street and Nutford Place from 9am to 10am and from 2:45pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending Hampden Gurney Church of England Primary School;
- Craven Terrace from 8:30am to 10am, from 12:30pm to 1:10pm, and from 2:15pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending St James and St John’s Church of England Primary School; and
- Bulstrode Street from 9:30am to 9:50am and from 3:30pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending Wetherby Senior School.

The temporary ‘School Streets’ support social distancing guidelines by creating space for pupils, parents and carers the space to safely get to and from the school gates.

The team are meaningfully implementing the ActiveStreets programme to encourage, facilitate and enable our schools, residents and communities to open up our streets for play and physical activity on the doorstep, increase in the number of people who know their neighbours, improve air quality and increase active travel in a variety of different ways; whether that be a ‘Play Street’, a ‘Street Play’ session or a ‘School Street’.

### **2.1.3 ACTIVEWESTMINSTER TABLE TENNIS PROGRAMME**

Table Tennis, as an activity, is regarded as one of the best by leading researchers to boost mental wellbeing and even minimise the impact of dementia. The PALS team have implemented an accelerated programme working in partnership with Table Tennis England to improve access to facilities to encourage residents to play table tennis and be active.

The PALS team have been successful in acquiring 400 table tennis home equipment sets which have been distributed amongst our Looked After Children and Care Leavers. In addition, the PALS team have launched the ActiveWestminster Table Tennis Programme across a number of locations across Westminster.

From early August the following locations were equipped with a new semi-permanent table and equipment, as well as a £360 activation fund per table, to allow two-hour sessions to be delivered each week for 18 weeks until October 2020 as part of the first phase of the programme:

- Lisson Grove (two tables were provided);
- Edbrooke Road Gardens;
- Lillington and Longmoore Garden Estate; and
- Ebury Bridge Estate.

In addition, as part of the first phase of the programme, we provided the following clubs with an indoor table and equipment to use:

- Crompton Street Shelter;
- Marylebone Project; and
- Caxton Youth Club.

There are two more phases planned as part of the programme so far, with the next planned for October 2020 at the following sites:

- Brunel Estate;
- Churchill Gardens Estate;
- Peabody Avenue;
- Tachbrook Estate;
- Bessborough Gardens; and
- Pimlico Gardens.

As part of the second phase of the programme, we will be providing the following clubs with an indoor table and equipment to use:

- The Avenues Youth Club;
- Marylebone Bangladesh Society Youth Club; and
- North Paddington Youth Club.

### **2.1.4 SAYERS CROFT**

Since being closed to the public in late March, refurbishment works to the site have been brought forward. These works included the demolition of the old water tower to make way for a new £250,000 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funded climbing tower to be constructed, and the renovation of our camping facilities.

During the summer holidays and once national government guidelines were revised, the Sayers Croft team offered a new camping and activity programme to Westminster families who could act as one household. The activities offered were limited to those that the team could safely manage and maintain social distancing guidelines. With only one month of the summer holidays to attract bookings

we have taken 32 enquiries, with 11 confirmed bookings to date. This has proven successful in its delivery and will be taken forward as new business during the summer holidays when we have fewer bookings.

In June, we re-opened bookings for the Forest School at Paddington Recreation Ground for dates in the Autumn term and so far, we have seen schools in Westminster booking their sessions as per usual.

However, as national government guidance is advising schools against residential, it is unlikely that the residential centre will see business as usual for the rest of the year. We have researched how best to meet the needs of those who should have been visiting the residential centre in Autumn to offer day visits as an alternative, which will help offset staffing costs. We recognise that whilst some schools are hopeful for a visit in October or November, some will want to cancel their visits altogether. Since March, we have offered postponements for visits until 2021.

## **2.2 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)**

### **2.2.1 WESTMINSTER CONNECTS**

Following the revision to national government guidelines on shielding, after 31 July shielding was paused unless the transmission of coronavirus started to rise significantly.

However, to support the recovery post-lockdown, Westminster Connects has established an effective network with local suppliers, developers and other businesses that want to make a difference in the community. Our aim through the network, which was established in August is to connect businesses with their communities, including voluntary and community sector organisations. We will use this network to promote the work of VCS organisations and to highlight need in our community which we identify through our Community Intelligence Forum.

Wherever possible, Council officers involved with the recovery work are developing projects with VCS organisations. For example, a new initiative being developed to help young people to train a cycle mechanics and to repair disused bikes is being developed with Groundwork London. Through the Council's Economy Team, we also provide a regular digest of external funding opportunities to VCS organisations to help them to access funds to deliver their programmes and meet local need.

In addition to this, the Westminster Connects team has been working on the following to support the Council's recovery work:

- Begun a rebranding process to establish the volunteer force as a key way for residents to continue to support their community;
- Continued to maintain the helpline, with referrals to the food banks for people in hardship;
- Begun work on a hardship fund, supported by government funds;
- Started a Business Network, to coordinate support from businesses;
- Maintained the Food Network Group, and developed a food transition plan in case of future lockdowns;
- Gathered lessons learned from the first phase of the pandemic; and
- Developed volunteer ideas with different council departments to increase the reach of services.

There is more detail on the work and plans for Westminster Connects in the separate report presented to this Committee on Monday 14 September 2020.

## **2.3 CULTURE**

We are working to hold a virtual Culture Network forum in the coming weeks to focus on recovery planning and sharing good practice amongst the sector in terms of responses to the pandemic situation.

The Council's Economy team have been providing advice and distributing a range of government grants (£10,000 - £25,000 for companies of rateable value under £51,000), and expanded rate reliefs (100% discount in rates for 20/21) to live arts, music and comedy venues. We have also recently allocated Section 106 funding to the Donmar Theatre to support a tour of a contemporary Shakespeare production 'Teenage Dick' which will play to five Westminster schools, reaching 750 schoolchildren, as soon as it is safe to deliver this.

In addition, the Council also won the Royal Society of Art's prestigious Cities of Learning competition recently and this programme will provide a framework for bringing together our local cultural institutions and learning providers to support young people's access to creative experiences and skills as part of our civic renewal planning.

## **2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Our Member Services team and Communications team have worked to promote the ward budgets as a way for communities to tackle local problems during recovery. We have not seen an increase in applications yet but will continue to promote this source of funding.

## **2.5 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

As we move into recovery, we are running multiple, targeted campaigns and online activity which are highly relevant to recovery. This includes online, cross-platform delivery for hospitality strategy and an ongoing re-opening response, NHS Test and Trace (with an emphasis on hard to reach communities), Sightsee Crowd Free (which has seen us partner with social media influencers for the first time), Back to School, rough sleeping and much more. Each Council-led campaign has been directed by the relevant Cabinet Member, with support from the Community Services and Digital portfolio.

### **2.5.1 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

As lockdown has eased, our Committee Services team has worked closely with the IT team to assess the feasibility of hosting hybrid Council meetings in accordance with national government guidelines. We hope to offer the option of a hybrid Council meeting in the future, which would see attendees and participants joining in person, and also virtually for the same meeting. This offering would help support the Council's plans to re-open the City, as well as national government's messaging to see employees return to work.

## **2.6 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY**

The Council has maintained, and continues to maintain, as close to business as usual as possible in relation to facilitating fibre deployments both in our streets and on our housing estates. By maintaining fibre deployment, it will support residents and businesses to access fast and reliable broadband connectivity which will help aid recovery.

## 3. Operational Updates

### 3.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORT (PALS)

#### 3.1.1 LEISURE CENTRES

Our maintenance and improvement work programmes were largely unaffected by the pandemic. We have worked alongside our construction and supplier partners to follow national government guidance to continue with the majority of works where safe to do so. While progress has been slower than usual due to the strict COVID-19 working protocols, the team have achieved many positive results. A number of these interventions are listed as follows:

##### ***Marshall Street Leisure Centre***

- Installation of a new chemical dosing system in the swimming pool;
- Extensive repairs carried out to the swimming pool roof;
- Refurbishment of the lift;
- Redecoration works carried out across the centre; and
- Ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air).

##### ***Porchester Centre***

- Installation of three new fully compliant lifts and one lift refurbished;
- Cleaning and upgrade of pool air handling units;
- Full refurbishment of main swimming pool and gym roof lanterns both internally and externally;
- Works to fully refurbish the main swimming pool continued;
- Ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air);
- Reinforcement of the main swimming pool tank alongside the replacement of all rusted and dilapidated circulation pipework;
- Improvement works completed in the spa on the doors, walls and floors; and
- Restorative repaint and redecoration work across the centre.

##### ***Paddington Recreation Ground***

- Construction of a new 'Lazy Brook' in the environmental area, complimenting the existing ponds and an extensive replanting scheme has taken place;
- Installation of a green roof built on top of the trackside containers, with the containers themselves soon to be planted with a variety of plants, to provide more biodiversity and habitat;
- Works are continuing to the new AstroTurf pitch in the 'D' of the athletics track.
- Construction of a new 60 metre sprint track;
- Installation of all new energy efficient LED lighting throughout the athletics track;
- A new purpose-built Calisthenics area;
- A new purpose-built Parkour Park;
- Installation of new air handling units that have a supply of fresh air and cleaning of duct work has taken place in the gym and studio; and
- Full rejuvenation of the AstroTurf tennis courts.

##### ***Queen Mother Sports Centre***

- Follow a full remodelling of the major swimming pool circulation pipework, to allow each of the separate swimming pools to have a wholly independent filtration system, the main swimming pool will reopen for lane swimming from Thursday 3 September 2020, alongside the teaching and diving swimming pools;

- Full replacement or refurbishment of all air handling units and cleaning of internal ducts, ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air);
- Refurbishment of the shower areas in the wet-side changing rooms and the poolside group change areas;
- Repairs to the main pool hall Barrisol ceiling panels;
- Upgrade to energy efficient LED lighting;
- Redecoration works;
- Exterior works to the roof, cladding and curtain walling; and
- Installation of a new fence and additional CCTV cameras to enhance security across the site.

#### ***Seymour Leisure Centre***

- Installation of new flooring in the dance studio;
- Parts of the centre are being redecorated; and
- Ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air).

### **3.1.2 MAJOR PROJECTS**

As with our maintenance and improvement work programmes for our leisure centres, the following major projects were largely unaffected by the pandemic:

#### ***Jubilee Leisure Centre***

Throughout lockdown, the detailed design work continued, and demolition works were completed on-site in preparation for the main works to commence on 24 August. The developer, EcoWorld, has worked closely with colleagues at the Council to ensure the work programme causes as little disruption to residents as possible. There is now a monthly community newsletter circulated amongst residents to update them on the programme. A virtual 'meet the contractor' event also took place on 25 August to give residents and ward members the opportunity to hear from the developers about the work programme and meet the newly appointed contractor, Boshers.

#### ***Seymour Leisure Centre***

The project has potential for a wide scale enhancement of both leisure and library services for Westminster residents within a fully co-located facility and could become a hub for both physical and mental wellbeing, whilst protecting the aging Grade II listed building. Council officers are working to draft a Strategic Outline Business Case for discussion between Cabinet Members.

#### ***Lisson Green pitch***

This project was made possible by working in partnership with Westminster Housing and having attracted external funding via the London Marathon Charitable Trust. The original pitch surface has been removed, new fencing and gates installed, and floodlights have been upgraded to date. The work to lay the new pitch surface has been delayed until national government guidance is revised to allow football to be played.

#### ***Luton Street Leisure Centre***

Main site works re-commenced on 27 April following changes to national government guidelines and is progressing well.

### **3.1.3 ACTIVEWESTMINSTER STRATEGY**

As part of our ActiveWestminster Strategy, we are planning to trial our proposed policy to remove restrictive signage, such as 'No Ball Games' and 'No Cycling' in the street or in communal areas across Westminster in due course. After the trial, we will review the impact the removal of this restrictive signage had on strengthening a culture of physical activity, leisure and sport, including play, in our neighbourhoods.

### **3.1.4 BUILT FACILITIES STRATEGY, PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY, AND LOCAL FOOTBALL FACILITY PLAN**

The Built Facilities Strategy (BFS), the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), and the Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) have been commissioned in response to Sport England's feedback on the City Plan 2040. The existence of a robust PPS, BFS and LFFP will enable informed and evidence-based decisions and actions to be made across a range of agendas including sports and play development, planning policy and planning applications, educational provision, funding, facility and asset management, public health and the management of provision and maintenance for these facilities. Early scoping work is currently underway to draft these strategies and plans.

## **3.2 CULTURE**

The Cultural Strategy for the next five years demonstrates our commitment to engaging more hard-to-reach residents in culture and we will work with our community and cultural partners to achieve this. The publication of our finalised Cultural Strategy was postponed in light of pandemic, but we hope to launch our finalised strategy in the coming weeks, taking into account the recovery situation for cultural institutions.

### **3.2.1 CITY LIONS**

The City Lions team continues to work closely with education establishments and youth organisations to expand our online offer by brokering opportunities for our young people.

## **3.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

### **3.3.1 OPEN FORUM**

After undertaking scoping exercises, the Council is planning to host our next Open Forum event in late September or early October, but this time it will be taking place virtually as national government guidelines do not permit large gatherings yet. Officers are currently working to pull together plans and once ready, we will be promoting this more widely.

### **3.3.2 WARD BUDGETS**

At the end of August 2020, since May 2018, we have allocated £1,570,229.93 towards 330 ward budget projects. This means there is £1,189,770.07 remaining to be allocated towards ward budget projects until March 2022. A ward-by-ward breakdown of expenditure is available for reference in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1: WARD BUDGET ALLOCATION SINCE MAY 2018 TO END OF AUGUST 2020 BY WARD**

<b>WARD</b>	<b>SPENT</b>	<b>REMAINING</b>
Abbey Road	£80,014.77	£57,985.23
Bayswater	£80,238.20	£57,761.80
Bryanston and Dorset Square	£26,312.66	£111,687.34
Churchill	£95,602.43	£42,397.57
Church Street	£102,100.00	£35,900.00
Harrow Road	£114,811.54	£23,188.46
Hyde Park	£11,882.82	£126,117.18
Knightsbridge and Belgravia	£58,137.00	£79,863.00
Lancaster Gate	£42,291.24	£95,708.76
Little Venice	£74,684.24	£63,315.76
Maida Vale	£83,915.70	£54,084.30
Marylebone High Street	£111,667.87	£26,332.13
Queen's Park	£104,719.67	£33,280.33
Regent's Park	£56,873.16	£81,126.84
St James's	£82,741.89	£55,258.11
Tachbrook	£70,641.77	£67,358.23
Vincent Square	£81,296.96	£56,703.04
Warwick	£115,631.42	£22,368.58
Westbourne	£97,494.67	£40,505.33
West End	£79,171.92	£58,828.08

### **3.4 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

#### **3.4.1 WEBSITE**

Our Digital team continues to work with the IT team on delivering our upcoming new corporate website. The new website is due to go live in November 2020 and will provide a vastly improved, seamless online experience, which puts the user first. The new site will deliver multiple efficiencies by way of enabling users to find what they need, fast, as well as giving the council the tools to personalise content and promote campaigns and events through colourful, contemporary new pages.

As a minimum, the new website meets AA requirements, and where possible AAA, under the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which is a single, shared, international standard for web content accessibility. All templates and the site's information structure has been rigorously tested with real users to help inform decision making.

#### **3.4.2 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS**

Since the start of the pandemic there have been some minor changes to working arrangements for complaints. Most services had capacity to answer complaints although it was recognised that they would take longer to deal with them as other priorities would take preference. In view of this services were asked to answer complaints as soon as it was practicably possible and to keep residents informed of delays, and to send holding replies when target response times could not be met. This message was also added to the Council's Complaints web page online.

Complaints about Business Rates were put on hold from the commencement of lockdown until 1 August 2020 because the service was engaged in allocating the funds received from national government under the special discretionary business rate grants scheme. All Stage 1 complaints about business rates that were put on hold are now up to date.

Between the start of March to 20 August 2020, we received 670 Stage 1 corporate complaints. This figure was down by 60 from the same period the previous year. For the same period, we received 71 Stage 2 corporate complaints, which was down 4 from the same period the previous year.

The complaints system is not configured to identify COVID-19 as a reason for making a complaint and therefore we cannot determine if the pandemic is a complaint trend. In addition, most of the initial concerns relating to the pandemic were answered by the relevant service areas as general queries and would have only entered the complaints procedure if the customer was unsatisfied with the reply to their concern.

Between the start of March to 20 August 2020, 56% of all Stage 1 complaints were completed within our target response times. Stage 2 response times have also slowed down and 52% of the cases answered as at 20 August 2020 were completed within 20 days. We anticipated that our response times would take longer than usual during lockdown due to staff sickness and urgent secondments for staff to provide priority assistance in response to the pandemic.

**3.4.3 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) REQUESTS**

In March 2020 the Information Commissioner (ICO) announced it would not penalise public authorities for failing to meet Freedom of Information (FOI) deadlines during the pandemic and that this would remain the case until the additional pressure on public authorities had been reduced significantly. However, the Council has endeavoured to maintain business as usual with our FOI service where possible.

We saw a significant decrease in FOI requests from March to the end of May 2020, when compared to the same period the previous year. For example, in 2020 we received 412 FOI requests, and in the same period in 2019 we received 510 FOI requests. Throughout this period, the nature of FOI requests remained varied but there has been a greater emphasis on the Council's response to the pandemic since March, particularly around the financial impact on the Council.

Since May, we have seen a steady increase in FOI requests as shown in Figure 2 below.

**FIGURE 2: FOI REQUESTS BETWEEN MARCH 2020 AND 21 AUGUST**

MONTH	FOI REQUESTS RECEIVED
March	234
April	104
May	74
June	114
July	122
August (up to 21 of the month)	57

In March 2020 the compliance rate (FOI's responded to in 20 working days) was 87%. This figure dropped to 77% in May but has since risen back to 91% in July. This dip in performance was partly

due to staff sickness and urgent secondments for staff to provide priority assistance in response to the pandemic.

As well as responding to requests for information, the Council must publish information proactively. We are currently in the early stages of a project seeking to work with all departments to publish more information online. This project is being driven by the type of information that is frequently requested under FOI. This work was placed on hold due to the pandemic, but we hope to progress this project as lockdown has eased.

#### **3.4.4 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CABINET MEMBERS**

The pandemic has slowed down our digital transformation programme as IT staff were tasked with priority projects to support the Council's response to the pandemic. However, the IT team is continuing to work on active digital transformation projects, such as:

- The Mobile Working Project will be delivering the ability for street-based council officers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices through a full end-to-end mobile platform. It is anticipated that this will be completed at the end of September;
- The Registrars Service Improvement project will be delivering a mobile payment system, self-checking kiosks, mobile printing, and a comprehensive service and room booking system. It is anticipated that this will be completed at the end of September;
- The Online Housing Register Applications Project will replace paper-based housing application forms with an improved online solution. It is anticipated that this will be completed at the end of September;
- The CRM for Housing project is progressing into the defining and planning phases, and is aiming to include the management of online service requests from residents; and
- The Housing Contact Centre Telephony project is progressing and will deliver new omni-channel capabilities, including text and social media. It is anticipated that the initial phase of delivery for this project will be the end of October.

#### **3.4.5 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Once the majority of priority IT projects in response to the pandemic were complete, the majority of IT staff returned to work on ongoing IT projects. During lockdown, the following projects were completed:

- The Capita Azure Migration project was completed in mid-July and included the migration of Capita's IT services to the Azure cloud; and
- The IT refit of the Lisson Grove offices.

The IT team continues to work on outstanding IT projects, such as:

- The migration of physical servers at Lisson Grove to the new cloud-based Azure environment;
- Large scale migration of applications and data from the Council's servers to the Azure cloud;
- The analysis of the Council's microsites with the intention to move and incorporate them into our new corporate website platform, with a similar look-and-feel where possible. This piece of work is ongoing and ties into the larger piece of work underway to overhaul and improve the Council's corporate website; and
- The 'technical debt' project, which looks to replace tactical solutions with those aligned with the IT architectural strategy set out for the Council, including a single-sign-on framework, a standard forms engine selection, a CRM and data warehouse datalink, a data retention policy, and a secure file transfer protocol. The first elements of this project are anticipated to be complete at the end of September.

**3.4.6 TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

As part of the Customer Experience and Digital programme, the Contact Centre Review project was established to ensure customers receive a consistent experience when contacting the Council. Since June 2020, work has been underway to progress the design of an assisted services hub operating model.

**3.5 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY**

**3.5.1 CITY-WIDE WAYLEAVE AGREEMENT**

The Council continues to deploy full-fibre connection to our housing stock by the end of 2021 as part of the City-wide Wayleave agreement. However, due to the pandemic, the Council and Operators have introduced the following measures to mitigate risks associated with continuing business as usual activity in light of COVID-19:

<p><b>Maintenance of social distancing for residents</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No work required inside resident’s flats</li> <li>• Majority of work is external, work in proximity to any individual resident’s home is of short duration</li> <li>• Operators toolbox talks include guidance for operatives on maintaining social distancing with residents</li> <li>• Operator comms makes clear residents can call Operator’s head office and do not have to speak to operatives on site</li> <li>• Operator comms makes clear residents can defer external work which requires access to their private balconies and gardens</li> </ul>
<p><b>Site safety measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operators have in place COVID-19 risk assessments and method statements for their work. They are using gloves, hand sanitiser, masks, maintaining social distancing where work tasks permit</li> <li>• Operators are managing welfare facilities to maintain social distancing</li> <li>• Operatives briefed on maintaining social distancing with residents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Westminster staff safety</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Manager has been provided with a parking permit and where necessary is driving to site on set days to avoid use of public transport</li> <li>• PPE provided</li> <li>• Site visits are being limited to WCC Project Manager and one Operator representative with full use of MS Teams being made to engage with other WCC stakeholders and operators</li> </ul>

Delivery to date has been strong and we currently have 63% of our housing stock connected with full fibre. For context the London average for full fibre availability is 18.32%. We anticipate that we will reach 80% full-fibre connection by April 2021 with universal coverage by the end of 2021.

**3.5.2 DIGITAL STREET MARKETS**

This project seeks to provide free Wi-Fi for market traders and ensure they have a reliable contactless solution for taking payments. The Council is currently out to procurement for a Wi-Fi operator to help deliver our Digital Street Markets Project, which is due to close on 18 September 2020.

As part of the project, the Council also intends to roll-out free digital training for small businesses across Westminster. We intend to go out to market for a digital training provider in the coming weeks. The focus of this training will be improving a business’ online presence and developing e-stores so

that should another lockdown happen businesses will have online sales channels they can use to help improve business resilience.

**3.5.3 CONNECTED BRITAIN AWARDS 2020**

The Council has been shortlisted for 'The Barrier Removal Award', which is a category in the Connected Britain Awards. The Council's application highlighted the work the Council has undertaken to achieve some of the fastest fibre deployment in the country, including its work on the Connect Westminster Project, Parking Bay Suspension discount for fibre providers, and our City-Wide Wayleave Agreement. We expect to find out the results of the awards at the conference scheduled to take place later in September.

**Appendix**

**To:** Chairman of Communities and Customer Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee  
Chairman of the Access to Culture Task Group  
**From:** Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Digital  
**Date:** 15 April 2020  
**Subject:** Response to recommendations of the Access to Culture Task Group

<b>Recommendation 1</b>
Introduce an integrated smartcard which unifies a number of council services (Libraries, Leisure, Westminster City Save, Free School Meals, Adult Social Care) and enables residents to have one multi-purpose council account.
<b>Cabinet Member comments:</b>
Cllr Swaddle is scoping out the opportunity for a council-wide smart card.
Recommendation is <b>PARTIALLY AGREED</b>

<b>Recommendation 2</b>
Review and improve the Westminster City Save scheme and website.
<b>Cabinet Member comments:</b>
A new Citysave website is being developed that will be more functional, secure and compatible with mobile devices.
Recommendation is <b>PARTIALLY AGREED</b>

### Recommendation 3

Encourage, support and facilitate opportunities in schools to increase/improve access to culture for young residents. This could include the roll out of the Westminster Children's University beyond the current nine participating schools. This could also include improving awareness of the offer and encouraging increased collaboration between schools and other institutions, such as the Rolls-Royce STE-A-M Evolution Project or The Wallace Collection Young Curators.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

Westminster has been successful in its recent Cities of Learning to RSA. This will lead to the creation of a borough-wide cultural learning model for Westminster to increase cultural capital and skills opportunities for young people and improve access to lifelong learning for all. This framework will increase digital connections and joined up working between education providers, cultural institutions and creative employers across the borough. It will create new creative career ways for those participating in existing Westminster initiatives such as City Lions and creative industry weeks.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

### Recommendation 4

Champion cultural opportunities by instigating and supporting a Culture Ambassadors scheme within Westminster schools.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

As part of the Cities of Learning programme, young ambassadors would be involved to play a role in co-designing the local offer, although they will not only be linked to schools but also other youth forums across the borough.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

### Recommendation 5

Embed Westminster City Lions as the primary conduit by which to increase cultural experiences and enrichment for younger residents aged between 13 and 16.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

The City Lions cultural enrichment programme for 13-16 year olds is set to develop further in 2019/20 to enable more in-depth engagement with greater qualitative targets. The City Lions brand will be amplified through increased comms activity and new partnerships with cultural organisations and creative employers. Innovative ways of working are being tested out in response to the COVID-19 crisis such as the pilot online model that was successful this Easter.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

### Recommendation 6

Work more closely with cultural partners and stakeholders in Westminster to create opportunities and experiences for Westminster families, school children, Westminster City Lions and older residents as part of a more holistic cultural offer.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

Cultural Strategy engagement and delivery will enable dialogue with local venues and organisations to increase the number of accessible cultural offers for Westminster residents and extend programmes such as Out and About. The Council will seek to promote the rich and diverse local cultural offer through council communication channels and cross-promotional platforms.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

#### Recommendation 7

Every child born in Westminster to have a Library card, through automatic enrolment, via the birth registration process. Every Westminster child starting school to have a Library card as part of the schools admissions/induction process.

#### Cabinet Member comments:

Trials in Hammersmith & Fulham have demonstrated libraries cards issued as part of birth registration were not used and most babies born in Westminster were not residents. Opt-out schemes for school joiners were more successful but GDPR changes have since created barriers. A more viable option to be explored with libraries would be to encourage parental sign-up during reception and year 7 school entry admissions.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

#### Recommendation 8

Encourage, support and facilitate culture in the local community by continuing to support and facilitate cultural events at neighbourhood/ ward level, especially in areas of the city that do not have dedicated cultural venues. This should include enabling and supporting local communities to use community spaces (e.g. libraries, community halls/school halls/academy spaces, sports centres) for cultural purposes.

#### Cabinet Member comments:

The Cultural Strategy will provide a framework for leveraging the potential of ward budgets, Community Contribution, #MyWestminster and Community Infrastructure Levy neighbourhood funds to support co-created community activities in both libraries and other neighbourhood settings to increase grass-roots engagement opportunities building on the success of Dance Westminster, Fun Palaces and #MyWestminster Day.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

#### Recommendation 9

Establish a dedicated council budget for culture, including scope for commissioning, to increase cultural capital for Westminster residents. This would also allow the council to include public art as part of any regeneration scheme and public realm project. Public art should be a key part of the council's approach to place shaping.

#### Cabinet Member comments:

The Cultural Strategy 'Creative Placemaking' section and the City Plan public realm chapters demonstrates the council's approach to ensuring culture and public art are at the heart of the placemaking and regeneration schemes.

The quality and impact of the council's temporary rolling City of Sculpture programme is set to improve through collaboration with community and arts partners following the appointment of an independent panel of advisors. Additional funding would enable public engagement activities, and this will be sought from sponsorship rather than ward budgets, in the first instance.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

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## Community Services, Business and Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	Monday, 14 September 2020
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Place Shaping and Planning
<b>Title:</b>	Update from the Cabinet Member for Business and Planning
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	Chloe Baker, Cabinet Officer <a href="mailto:cbaker@westminster.gov.uk">cbaker@westminster.gov.uk</a>

### COVID-19 Response

#### 1 Business response

- 1.1 Since mid-March, the Council has been proactive and thorough in providing support to local businesses. This has included upscaling the support offered by the Westminster Business Unit. The number of enquires handled by this service has now exceeded 3,400 cases and the Business Unit has also conducted 30 bespoke one-to-one appointments for businesses with nuanced and complex cases.
- 1.2 As reported in June, the City Council quickly mobilised to administer the top up discretionary grant scheme announced by Government, launching this on 27 May, ahead of any other London Borough. The fund was open exclusively to businesses in shared offices/flexible workspaces, bed & breakfasts which pay Council Tax instead of business rates, charity properties and market traders.
- 1.3 Since July, the Business Unit has been supporting the Business Rates team, screening applications for Hardship Rate Relief to ensure that businesses are eligible to submit an application and to also make sure they have received any other support they are eligible for. Since 20 July, 269 appointments have been conducted with businesses, and we have been able to identify several businesses eligible for other financial support. So far, as a result of these appointments, £1,065,001 worth of alternative support has been identified and awarded to Westminster businesses, with an additional £456,632 waiting to be confirmed. This alternative financial support is a combination of government grants, small business rate relief and expanded rate relief.

#### 2 Planning response

- 2.1 The Planning Department has continued to function effectively throughout the pandemic, with staff working remotely using pre-existing digital processes to validate, assess and determine applications. Pre-application planning advice and guidance has continued to be

provided using virtual tools, which has worked well to ensure minimal impact on the operation of the Council's development management function.

- 2.2 Planning committees continue to be held remotely on a bi-weekly basis using Microsoft Teams, and has been incredibly effective, drawing larger audiences than pre-COVID-19.

### **3 Westminster Employment Service (WES) response**

- 3.1 During lockdown, the WES team rapidly adapted to community need, playing a leading role in the Westminster Connects programme. Over half the team were involved in setting up, managing and supporting the delivery of the programme, mobilising volunteers, connecting business to local projects and establishing the weekly Intelligence Forum.
- 3.2 There was an evident need for financial capability scale up in response to the pandemic. The Financial Capability Officer in WES supported the formation of a team of redeployees from the Libraries Service by training them up to respond to and assist Westminster businesses affected by the pandemic, many of whom have no recourse to public funds.
- 3.3 Throughout this period, WES has continued to deliver its core business of supporting clients in need through regular welfare and check-in calls. Recruitment activity by most employer partners has been minimal, however 38 residents have still been helped into jobs during this period. A particular focus for the team has been to work with Housing colleagues, local hostels and charity partners to help the street homeless, who had been housed in local into employment, as illustrated below.
- 3.4 MO was referred to WES on 03/04/2020 and was assigned to work with a coach in the HELP Team (Homeless Employment Learning Project – Westminster Employment Services). This team offers support and works holistically with clients to help them into employment and assist with housing matters and other issues that they may have that are barriers to gaining employment. MO is a single homeless man from Romania, and he has been working in the UK on and off since 2015. He was unable to afford his accommodation and became street homeless. St. Mungo's approached him whilst he was sleeping rough on the streets and he was subsequently provided temporary accommodation in a hotel in Paddington. WES has supported the client by helping him to secure a full-time role in Decontamination in Westminster's Parks for 3 months with effect from 06/07/2020. He is currently in temporary accommodation in Dagenham and WES has provided him with travel costs to enable him to get into work. His coach is currently supporting him by looking at affordable private rented accommodation and securing more sustainable employment. The service has also provided him with a top-up for his mobile phone, Tesco vouchers and PPE. A referral has also been made to our Financial Capability Officer to assist him with his appeal on his Universal Credit claim, as his application was unsuccessful.

### **4 Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) response**

- 4.1 Following the announcement of lockdown, WAES mobilised 3000 learners and staff body off-site to remote learning from a classroom-based model. Using Microsoft Teams, WAES has maintained learner engagement, with approximately 75% of learners continuing to study, equating to 2,250 learners. Working with the most disadvantaged communities, feedback from learners indicated that home study conditions are not fit for purpose, however despite these conditions, learners have demonstrated their desire to learn and continue their journey of improvement, regardless of lockdown restrictions.
- 4.2 At a Pan-London level, WAES was central to establishing the "*Keep London Learning*" initiative, which started off as collaboration of central London local authority adult education providers and later expanded to cover all London boroughs. This initiative, supported by

the GLA and Central London Forward, helped raise awareness of all online learning opportunities available to residents throughout lockdown.

**4.3** To bolster morale, WAES also conducted a series of online events, showcases and awards to celebrate achievement and success in a time of unsettlement and uncertainty. These events included;

- *Family Learning Festival July*: this involved a series of workshops and seminars on a range of creative and wellbeing matters, engaging over 400 participants;
- *The Show Online*: this was a celebratory exhibition of work for the fashion, hairdressing and make-up learners, championing green themes and inspiring creativity whilst in lockdown;
- *Virtual Private View*: this annual event was held via Zoom, for the Graphic Design, Ceramics and Fine Art learners;
- *Annual Learner Awards*: this event celebrated success across the WAES service. There were over 70 nominations and of those, 25 learners were also given the WAES to Success Award, recognising contribution to studies and achievement;
- *Staff Awards*: this celebrated the exceptional work of the WAES staff;
- *South West Fest Online*: WAES delivered 3 online workshops as part of this annual event.

## **5 Movement Strategy**

**5.1** The movement strategy successfully delivered multiple schemes across the borough to support walking, cycling and the reopening of non-essential retail post lockdown. The strategy focused on transport hubs, key walking and cycling routes and high streets. Schemes were developed to widen footways to allow people to feel safe and mobile, with adequate space to socially distance. Strategic cycle routes were also developed to enable people to travel safely without using public transport and enjoy Westminster on two wheels.

**5.2** The programme was developed to support residents and workers coming out of lockdown to give them the assurance that it was safe to move around the city using preferred, sustainable modes of transport. The programme was planned to be in place from June to August, and the process of reviewing the schemes and planning for their removal has commenced.

**5.3** The Council also facilitated contact between Q Park, WCC's car park provider and BIDs to help provide secure bicycle parking places for businesses.

## **6 Hospitality Reopening**

**6.1** The second phase of the Movement Strategy was focused around the opening of the hospitality sector in the City. Temporary measures to facilitate outdoor dining were implemented across the city around clusters of hospitality venues from July for a period of three months. The design and delivery of the scheme was integrated with the licensing process to reflect a "One Council" approach to business recovery. The scheme has been widely covered by media and has received positive feedback across the community, businesses and stakeholders. Measures will be in place until the end of September and are currently in active use. These areas are being monitored to provide quantitative and qualitative data to inform decision making in these areas in the future.

## 7 Sightsee Crowd Free Campaign

- 7.1 A promotional campaign for the West End has been launched to encourage visitors from surrounding London boroughs and the home counties to come to the West End and boost the local economy. The aim of the campaign is to support businesses by reassuring visitors it's safe to enjoy the West End, by promoting the unique blend of attractions that cannot be found in any other locality, and how this is a great opportunity to explore the area while it's quieter. The campaign went live the week commencing 10 August 2020 and was covered by BBC Radio London, BBC Radio Essex and the Evening Standard. Details can be found here <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sightseecrowdfree>

## COVID-19 Recovery

### 8 Westminster Employment Service (WES) recovery

- 8.1 At a time of increasing need, the WES ambition for this year is to support more residents through the service and into jobs. The level of need will be greater, and we will help more residents to access the service through harnessing volunteers to work alongside our coaches and employer engagement managers and strengthening outreach and collaboration with the Westminster Adult Education Service. This year, we aim to have 1,000 residents access the service compared to 778 last year, and to support 400 residents into employment (last year 390).
- 8.2 During lockdown there was virtually no recruitment and a number of sectors have been significantly reducing their workforce, with our clients impacted by both cuts and a higher volume of newer, more skilled job-seekers chasing vacancies. Our recovery plans therefore include strengthening collaboration with the Adult Education Service and others to reskill clients, including in new and emerging sectors, such as digital skills and green jobs.
- 8.3 WES has increased its provision for NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people through securing funding from 'Invest to Save', in anticipation of an expected increase in this cohort as a result of the pandemic. With effect from August 2020, 2 Specialist Youth Development Coaches will be focusing on this cohort. This adds to our offer for young people and is in addition to a Senior Employment Coach working in the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit and a Senior Housing and Employment Coach working with Looked After Children's Leaving Care Service. We will also look to secure additional funding for two more NEET workers through the Department for Work and Pensions' Community Budget Funding.

### 9 Westminster Wheels

- 9.1 Building on the remarkable response of the community during the pandemic and as a front line offer to support greening initiatives, vibrant communities and digital access and skills, we are developing an ambitious new community project, *Westminster Wheels*. This programme aims to refurbish 2,000 bikes per annum delivered by 30 unemployed residents including care leavers.
- 9.2 The initiative will divert unwanted bikes from becoming waste to provide affordable refurbished bikes, focusing on low income families impacted by COVID-19. The ambition is to build a sustainable business through the sale of bikes. In addition, it will donate circa 20% bikes every year to encourage young people from vulnerable families to cycle and help them attend work and training.
- 9.3 Throughout August, the Economy Team has liaised and set up a steering group made up of colleagues from Highways, Transport and Road Safety teams as well as external partners such as Groundworks, Unity Kitchen and Cycle Confident. The group is working towards

identifying locations to set up bike repair shops, including Church Street and Tachbrook Street Markets.

- 9.4 The development of pitches for funding and resources from various sources, such as the Government's 'Kickstart' initiative, are in train. The Team aim to start the project in September 2020, including cycle training for school children, and jobs and training taster days in September for young people, leading to pre-employment training in October.

## **10 Business Community Partnership**

- 10.1 The Responsible Economy Team has established the Business Community Partnership function, aimed to more effectively connect businesses with community programmes. It will include a regular business network, providing consistent communication between the Council, Great Estates, Developers, Suppliers, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and FTSE100 companies. The aim is to make networking more accessible with community groups and to encourage collaboration and resource to address shared priorities aligning with recovery.

## **11 Economic Recovery & Prosperity Programme**

- 11.1 The Economic Recovery and Prosperity Programme will look to support the city's economic recovery whilst increasing economic prosperity of residents and creating opportunities for future generations. The programme will assist those most affected by the recession, whilst building a future with sustainability, and will influence and shape the post-COVID-19 economic system to build wealth and prosperity.
- 11.2 The workstreams that the initiative will focus on will include 'Building Business Resilience', 'Reskilling for Recovery', 'Stimulating and Accelerating Economic Recovery' and 'Championing a Green Economic Recovery.' An overview and detailed list of initiatives for each workstream to date can be found in appendix 1 to this report.
- 11.3 To date, workstream officer groups have been convened, drawing representation from across the Council, and work has started on all four workstreams. The Building Business Resilience workstream is well underway as the Council's business support offer quickly shifted to support businesses at the start of the pandemic, and some early initiatives have been implemented to mitigate the impact of the recession.
- 11.4 In recent weeks, the Re-skilling for Recovery workstream has gained momentum, having agreed their priority groups (Women, BAME, Children and Young People, Older Workless, Vulnerable and those financially impacted) and undertaken a 'mapping and gapping' exercise for proposed projects. Work is now commencing on developing the initial tranche of project proposals. Green Economic Recovery and Stimulating and Accelerating Economic Recovery workstreams are both at an early stage of development.

## **12 Planning recovery**

- 12.1 The Planning Department has been looking to implement new ways of working. Following a risk assessment of officer site visits in early August, a new site visit protocol for officers has been implemented. This has enabled site visits to be recommenced where necessary to enable complex and controversial planning applications to be determined. However, in view of the ongoing impact of COVID-19, officers continue to be encouraged to use other digital means to assess the impact of development proposals where appropriate.
- 12.2 Since June, Government has introduced a number of measures aimed at assisting the development sector to recover. These include an application process to enable developers to seek extended construction hours, increasing permitted development rights for markets

run by local authorities, temporarily removing the need for planning permission for tables and chairs on the highway (relying instead on a temporary licensing regime until September 2021) and automatically extending permissions and consents due to expire between 23 March 2020 and 31 December 2020 to 1 May 2021.

- 12.3 Government has also permanently amended the Use Classes Order to allow greater flexibility between certain uses, with the aim that this aids economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19.
- 12.4 The implications of these changes to national planning regulations on application numbers and the townscape, environment and vibrancy of the city will be monitored following the dates they come into force, between July and September 2020.

### **13 Virtual Planning Committees and Inquiries**

- 13.1 Officers are reviewing the options for how Planning Committees are held. Currently the plan is for planning committees to revert to a conventional office-based committee meeting with the possibility for online contributions from members, officers and speakers.
- 13.2 The Planning Inspectorate have introduced virtual planning inquiries following changes to planning regulations in response to COVID-19 impact. Initial responses indicate this approach has worked well and will serve to minimise delays at the appeal stage of the planning process.

### **14 Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) recovery**

- 14.1 WAES is contributing to business recovery through successfully gaining additional GLA funding to support training with skills and employment focus for residents and businesses. The service is currently running distanced learning programmes in health and social care to enable upskilling of existing employees and new entrants to the sector, engaging over 100 learners, and has also commenced online employability programmes in construction, engaging 40 new learners. The service is seeking to train furloughed staff and those at risk to gain additional skills in a smaller recruitment market. Additionally, WAES are running digital skills summer school offer in August and September and bespoke programmes in Commercial Cleaning to be delivered in October.
- 14.2 WAES has embarked on a programme to transform the course application and enrolment process to online; this work was commenced prior to the pandemic but was accelerated as centres closed. September marks the new academic year, and as such WAES has reviewed and repositioned all business processes to ensure they can maintain COVID-19 safe enrolment and admissions processes. So far, 600 learners have enrolled for September, a positive figure in the context of the pandemic.
- 14.3 In preparation for the new academic year, WAES has submitted a bid to the GLA to support IT upgrades needed to ensure the service can continue to deliver remotely and physical adaptations to maintain COVID-19 secure learning and working environments. Modifications have been made across WAES sites, including signage, shielded reception areas and sanitisation stations to keep learners and staff returning to sites secure, and management team have implemented a 1-metre-plus principle to ensure site capacity can be managed.

### **15 City for All refresh**

- 15.1 A refreshed delivery plan for City for All is in development. The Business and Planning Portfolio will be committing to several new priority actions over the course of the next year and beyond to stimulate recovery and rebuild communities in the wake of COVID-19. The City for All programme has been refreshed to accommodate and respond to the changes

and challenges Westminster has faced over the course of the pandemic. Whilst several commitments remain the same as the initial strategy, several have been introduced to meet these new challenges and rebuild Westminster's economy and communities.

- 15.2** The refreshed strategy will reset priorities and provide a milestone timeline to keep the Council and portfolios to task. Further updates on the work being undertaken under City for All will be provided in future reports.

## **Operational issues**

### **16 City Plan**

- 16.1** The City Plan is currently being examined by two independent Inspectors, appointed by the Secretary of State. Their role is to interrogate policies and their evidence base to determine if the Plan is 'sound'. Two weeks of public hearings are scheduled to take place virtually in the Autumn.
- 16.2** The Inspectors have recently issued a formal question to the Council to understand the implications the changes to Use Classes Order (coming into effect on 1 September) will have on the draft policies. These changes merge several 'use classes' and remove the need for planning permission for certain uses, such as changing a shop to an office or office to restaurant. Several draft policies are affected by this change, namely those seeking to protect office floorspace in the Central Activities Zone and retail floorspace at ground floor in Westminster's town centres. A response to the Inspectors setting out the policy changes the Council feels are necessary will be published on the Council's website by 4 September.
- 16.3** The Government recently published a White Paper, *Planning for the Future*, which set out proposals for a radical reform on the English planning system.

### **17 Neighbourhood plans**

- 17.1** Westminster's Neighbourhood Forums continue to work on their neighbourhood plans. Soho and Fitzrovia West are the most advanced, having recently completed the formal Regulation 16 consultation on their draft plans. The next stage will be examination undertaken by an independently appointed examiner, most likely taking place via written representation rather than public hearings.
- 17.2** Under normal circumstances once these plans have been through examination (and assuming they meet the 'basic conditions' required by such plans) the next step would be to proceed to referendum. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that it is not possible to hold referendums and new guidance issued by the Planning Inspectorate sets out that neighbourhood plans which have been through examination can be attributed significant weight in planning decisions.

### **18 Planning Review**

- 18.1** The operational impacts on the planning service of the Planning Review are set out in a separate full report on this Committee agenda.

### **19 Ongoing public realm projects**

- 19.1** The public realm programme has continued to be delivered throughout this period. There have been some minor delays in delivery due to staff resources being diverted to the delivery of the Movement Strategy and a pause in the private sector schemes coming forward. It is

anticipated that this will be rectified across the second half of the year. A developing risk is the lack of engagement from Transport for London (TfL) on project delivery outside their London Street Space programme. This will have delivery impact on schemes requiring signal change and modelling work. Discussions with TfL are ongoing.

- 19.2** Regarding specific schemes, we are on site at Queensway making improvements to the pedestrian environment by providing wider footways and removing loading from the road at peak times. We are also improving lighting, planting new trees and introducing cycle parking.
- 19.3** The renovation of Christchurch Gardens is scheduled for completion in early September. The park will have new planting, new seating opportunities, SUDS, new lighting, new natural stone and feature paving, a drinking water fountain and new trees.
- 19.4** Rupert Street public realm improvements are complete. The scheme involved widening the eastern footway and restricting loading to the morning.

## **20 Ongoing place shaping projects**

- 20.1** The Place Shaping Team are currently seeing our priorities and projects for delivery in the short and medium term across focus areas.
- 20.2** Harrow Road was successful in obtaining £900,000 from the GLA's Good Growth Fund. Work on projects is under way with delivery around Maida Hill Market, High Street and improvement to canal routes programmed for delivery by August 2021.
- 20.3** The original programme for delivery of Strand Aldwych was impacted by COVID-19. The programme has been revised to bring forward the delivery of a meanwhile version of the scheme, moving forward with the traffic changes along Aldwych. This will facilitate wider business and cultural recovery efforts in the area and provide the opportunity to test components of the management model towards the final scheme. It is to be noted that given the signalling changes and modelling work required around this scheme, the approval of traffic changes along Aldwych are reliant on TfL resource availability.
- 20.4** In regard to the Future Victoria project, whilst technical work has continued throughout lockdown, public engagement and engagement with TfL has been challenged as a consequence of the pandemic. The project ambition and intent to place public engagement at the heart of the design process remains intact. The programme has been revised to ensure that a robust engagement strategy is in place as lockdown lifts. Alternate means to engage and ensure community representation are currently being explored.

## **21 Markets**

- 21.1** The Peter Street Storage unit came into the Council's possession in December 2019. The storage unit has had no investment for over 20 years and was in need of modernisation and a series of interventions to ensure the unit is fit for purpose.
- 21.2** The unit has been designed in collaboration with trader requirements and works have begun on improving facilities for both Rupert and Berwick Street traders. To date the works have included building secure cabinets to house individual refrigerated units so traders can store items safely. Each individual cabinet has been built and now has a secure fridge within each unit which is lockable and secure for traders.
- 21.3** The fees and charges associated with storage for Berwick and Rupert Street traders have been suspended until 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. This decision was made by the Cabinet Member for Business and Planning to further support traders during the pandemic.

Traders have been receiving free storage since Westminster took back ownership of the storage unit in December 2019.

- 21.4** The lighting and emergency lighting in the unit has been greatly improved. A new roller shutter has been fitted to the entrance which is extremely quiet and robust providing the security required by traders. There are ongoing works to be completed such as the laying of new flooring which will make a big improvement in terms of noise reduction to residents and assist traders in having a level flooring in place to wheel their carts. This is currently planned to be undertaken on 4 and 5 September. We are also putting in place pest control measures.

## **22 Digital Street Markets**

- 22.1** In July 2020 the Council entered a grant agreement with the GLA to secure ERDF funding to deliver the Digital Street Markets Project. The project is match funded by the Council. The Digital Street Markets Project seeks to deliver free wi-fi in the six Council operated street markets whilst also delivering free digital training to small and medium sized enterprises to ensure they have the skills to utilise this improved connectivity.
- 22.2** Following the approval of the project we have started the procurement of a Wi-Fi operator and an invitation to tender was published on Capital E-Sourcing on the 17<sup>th</sup> August. The procurement approach for the digital training provider is being finalised and the opportunity will be published shortly.

## **23 Westminster Adult Education Service**

- 23.1** WAES now has an offer in four different vocational pathways – Graphic Design, Health and Social Care with Childcare, Business and Digital for young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). In addition to the main vocational programme these programmes will offer English and maths as well as work experience. Learners will receive mentoring and have a full tutorial and pastoral programme to support them to achieve their qualifications and end goals. This is currently being promoted through our website and via the WCC SEND team.
- 23.2** The GLA is funding an innovative and bespoke programme, *Positive Pathways Project*, to reduce crime, which will be focused on the Church Street ward. Working in partnership with Goals UK, WAES are targeting intervention with young people (19-23) involved in or at risk of involvement in crime and offering resilience and change programmes, as well as working with the community leaders and families to develop awareness. Appropriate ESOL support as well as employability programmes will be targeted to help individuals into work.
- 23.3** The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is funding WAES to deliver a project to support residents who have English as second Language and help them to develop English language skills, encourage social relationships between different communities and improve community integration. This will involve short ESOL courses to develop language skills, but also a programme of conversation clubs to develop deeper skills and an understanding of speaking and listening in general communication and social contexts to enable those engaged to become more self-confident and independent.
- 23.4** Supported by WAES staff and through their own hard work and determination, many learners have achieved their learning goals. This year, WAES had 74 adults studying GCSE English, of these 69 (93.3%) passed and 44 (60.8%) achieved high grades. For maths GCSE, there were 69 adults in total, 54 (78.3%) passed and 41 (60.9%) achieved

high grades. These results are a significant improvement from last year, a testament of the rigorous process put in place to support learning in lockdown.

- English overall achievement
- 93.3% – up from 73.3% last year
- English 9 – 4 (A\*– C) grades
- 60.8% – up from 55.6% last year
- Maths overall achievement
- 78.3% – up from 76.4% last year
- Maths 9 – 4 (A\*– C) grades
- 60.9% – up from 57.3% last year

**23.5** Below are three learner stories that illustrate the importance of this achievement to the learners.

**23.6** A mother of three originally from Morocco who achieved a Grade 5 for English and a Grade 7 for maths GCSE. She started at WAES as an ESOL student and became interested in teaching assistant roles in order to support her own children's schoolwork, as she was aware that the methods she had learned at school in Morocco were different from how the boys were being taught in London. She started by volunteering and her managers at the school suggested that she take GCSEs. Although initially lacking in confidence, she has progressed to qualifying as a teaching assistant and now works in a local primary school. Having these GCSEs will support her further career development and will enable her to progress to her next qualification.

**23.7** A learner who started at WAES in 2010 from entry level started by studying ESOL but has since passed GCSE maths and has completed her teaching assistant qualification at WAES. The final piece to complete was a re-take of GCSE English to improve the grade that she received in 2018. The learner was interviewed for a teaching assistant job at a local primary school just as lockdown was starting and having now gained a Grade 4 at GCSE will be able to move on in her ambition to assist children in the classroom.

**23.8** This learner gained a Grade 4 for English GCSE. This was her second attempt at GCSE English having taken the qualification at another college last year and not achieving the grade she needed to become properly qualified for the workplace. Despite challenging personal circumstances this year, she completed the course and scored the grade she needed, which will enable her to enter the workplace. Moving from being a volunteer to an employee.

## **Appendix 1: Economic Recovery and Prosperity Programme Workstreams**

### **Building Business Resilience**

- Business Survey – Live: Rapid Summary of results available, full analysis available shortly, next Survey scheduled for September 2020
- Scaled-up Business Unit - Live
- Successful & Timely Administration of the Government's COVID-19 Business Grants Schemes - Live
- Local 'Open for Business' Map - Live
- 'Shop Local' Campaign - Live
- Building Confidence Campaign – Live (phase 1 'sightsee crowd free')
- Proactively support businesses with 'smart compliance' so they can re-open safely - Live
- Resilience Themed Pop-Up Business School - Delivered
- Adapt-Survive-Thrive: Resilience for future growth Pilot - Live
- Digital Street Markets & Digital Skills Training - funding secured, procurement process initiated
- Rapid Response Digital Skills Training for High Street Businesses - approved for delivery
- Expert Professional Panel & Helpline to support Westminster businesses in crisis - approved for delivery
- Business Preparedness – in development
- Hardship Rates Relief Screening Appointments - Live

### **Reskilling for Recovery**

- Westminster Employment Service - Live
- Scaled-up Financial Capability & Wellbeing Support – Live (sustainability subject to external funding bid)
- On-line preparation for work classes delivered with WES, WAES and our employer partners – Live: There is currently an online construction course that is being delivered fortnightly
- City Lions Virtual Offer - Live
- Westminster Wheels: Cycle Maintenance & Repairs Service with a social enterprise partner - In development
- Tech Talent Accelerator & Sponsored Jobs Scheme for BAME Westminster YP in partnership with Whitehat & Generation – In development (subject to external funding bid)
- Bi-borough Careers Cluster – In development (subject to external funding bid)
- Support for Bi-borough schools to achieve the Quality in Careers Standard and progress towards the achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks – In development (subject to external funding bid)
- Create the right conditions for women to start up a business, set up a knowledge hub, connect with female entrepreneurs, role models and mentors etc - proposed
- Partner with an appropriate organisation to deliver Diversity & Unconscious Bias training for local businesses – proposed

- Cities of Learning – approved for delivery
- Work with employers to build a fairer flexible local labour market. Developing more sustainable flexible working across a range of industries will be key to enabling many to stay in work and balance work, care and health – proposed
- Assess the impact of the pandemic on early years childcare provision in Westminster to ensure it is sufficient for those wishing to go to work/retrain etc - proposed
- Education piece - stories of womens' experience of COVID-19 raising awareness and understanding of issues specific to women - proposed
- Reduce barriers to growth for ethnic minority owned businesses – proposed
- Education piece: Diversity & bias training for business and our partners – proposed
- Broker opportunities in sectors where BAME are under-represented and with organisations with a commitment to increase diversity and inclusion – proposed
- Tailored support for 50+ workless and work with employers to reduce discrimination against older workless when applying for jobs – proposed
- Intergenerational project where over 50's made redundant/lost livelihood support mentor NEET young people – proposed
- Westminster Work Grant subsidised job creation scheme for older unemployed residents that need to continue working in the context of older working lives but will struggle to compete for jobs particularly during a recession – proposed
- Expand the number and range of employers providing Supported Internship opportunities to SEND young people – proposed
- Disability Awareness training/information sessions for Westminster employers to ensure accurate understanding of disability to tackle the disability employment gap – proposed
- Provide a dedicated SEND Specialist employment coach within WES for young people with SEND/autism that do not meet the threshold of WCC statutory provision – proposed
- Reduce in-work poverty by working with the business community to communicate the business benefits demonstrated by the Living Wage Foundation and encourage more businesses to offer at least the London Living Wage – proposed
- Influence the provision of education and training providers operating in the borough to ensure it meets employers' needs in view of evolving economic priorities and provides the best platform for Westminster residents to compete effectively for jobs once employers start re-hiring – proposed
- Increase the number of women and girls studying STEM subjects and entering STEM careers where females are currently underrepresented – proposed
- Scale up support for NEET young people in order to meet the anticipated increase in demand as a result of the recession and impact of the disruption to academic studies, Apprenticeships and first employments as a result of the pandemic – proposed
- Address the gap in the local offer for young people with SEND who do not have Education & Health Care Plans – proposed

### **Stimulating and Accelerating Economic Recovery**

- Invest in Westminster service - proposed
- New Business Development Programme – proposed
- Maximising opportunities through Procurement to stimulate the recovery (i.e. infrastructure projects, the potential to focus on Westminster businesses and direct our funds to them, providing the infrastructure to maximise business to business opportunities and influencing the spending power of the borough's anchor institutions) - proposed

### **Championing a Green Economic Recovery**

- Support the business community to improve efficiencies, reduce their energy use and explore innovative low carbon solutions to promote sustainable growth including targeted support for SMEs - proposed

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## Community Services and Business Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	14 September 2020
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Westminster Connects
<b>Report of:</b>	Debbie Jackson, Executive Director, Growth Planning & Housing
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Councillor Paul Swaddle, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital <a href="http://www.westminster.gov.uk/cabinet">www.westminster.gov.uk/cabinet</a> )
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	City for All
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	Christine Mead, Community Resilience Manager <a href="mailto:cmead@westminster.gov.uk">cmead@westminster.gov.uk</a> 07817 053912

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Westminster Connects was established in March/April 2020 to provide information to residents about Covid-19 and the council's response, to coordinate the efforts of the voluntary sector to respond, and to direct the activities of thousands of volunteers who wanted to help those who were made vulnerable by Covid-19.
- 1.2 Westminster Connects operated as a helpline and a focal point on the council's websites to direct residents to support. It also maintained a CRM and way of contacting the almost 10,000 Westminster residents who were shielding. It delivered meals, shopping and medicines, as well as wellbeing support to isolated and shielding residents.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to summarise what Westminster Connects delivered during the first phase of the pandemic, detail the lessons learned, and discuss the plans for the development of Westminster Connects in the future.
- 1.4 In a short period of time, Westminster Connects was able to mobilise thousands of residents to support those who were made more vulnerable by the pandemic, and to mobilise staff, VCS organisations and businesses to work collaboratively.

- 1.5 Residents and community organisations valued having one phone number, central information point and people able to answer multiple questions about services, and make referrals to meet residents' needs.
- 1.7 Businesses who wanted to contribute to the response valued being directed to where the most urgent needs were, and contributed greatly to food supply and refrigeration, meal [preparation, and PPE supply.
- 1.8 The opportunity exists now to continue to work with the good will of the volunteers and expand the range of volunteer opportunities beyond a pandemic response.
- 1.9 As Covid-19 will be present in the community for some time, the ongoing base of support in Westminster Connects can be used to scale up or scale down services should there be future lockdowns.

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

Committee is asked to consider:

- I. The progress made in the past 4 months since establishing Westminster Connects.
- II. Our plans and ambition to develop Connects to support City for All and respond to a second wave of the pandemic.

**3. Background**

Appendix 1 sets out further information regarding the Westminster Connects and for consideration by Committee:

<b>Section</b>	<b>What the Section covers</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Overview of the elements of Connects, who we help and the people and organisations who contribute
<b>Context</b>	Considering the different contexts between the emergency phase of the pandemic and the recovery phase
<b>Service Impact and achievements</b>	Needs met, volunteers deployed, feedback from volunteers and VCS and business involvement
<b>Lessons learned</b>	Sets out the lessons learned from the first phase in terms of the shielding, volunteers, opportunities, systems and the council
<b>Connects Vision</b>	Aims and objectives for future development, transforming Connects into a bigger, more wide reaching volunteer force which supports residents, extends the reach of council services, and builds stronger connections with the VCS and with businesses.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Report Author Christine Mead 07817 053912 [cmead@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:cmead@westminster.gov.uk)**

## **APPENDICES: 1 Presentation on Westminster Connects**

### **Glossary for presentation:**

BAME – Black and Minority Ethnic communities

DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service, checks carried out to ensure people are safe to work with or support vulnerable people

Shielding – residents categorised by their doctors as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) and advised to stay home during the period of national lockdown and for an extended period afterwards, to protect them from Covid-9

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector, charities and organisations working with volunteers to support individuals and communities

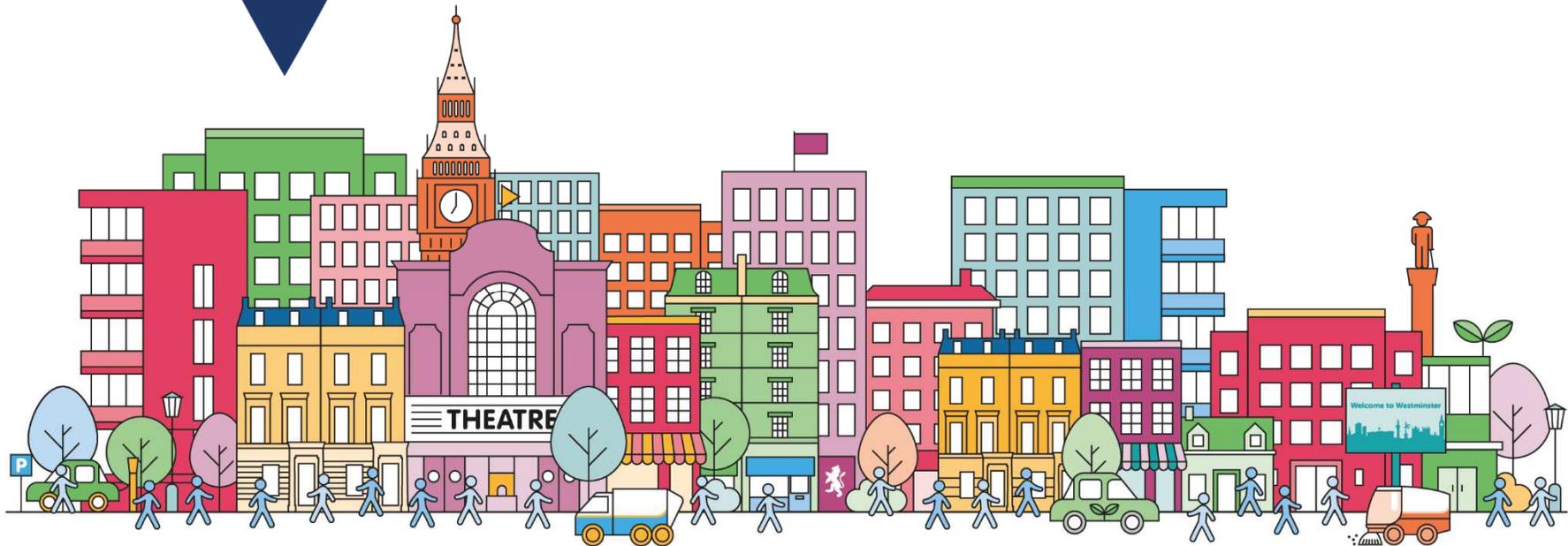
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Appendix 1

# Westminster Connects

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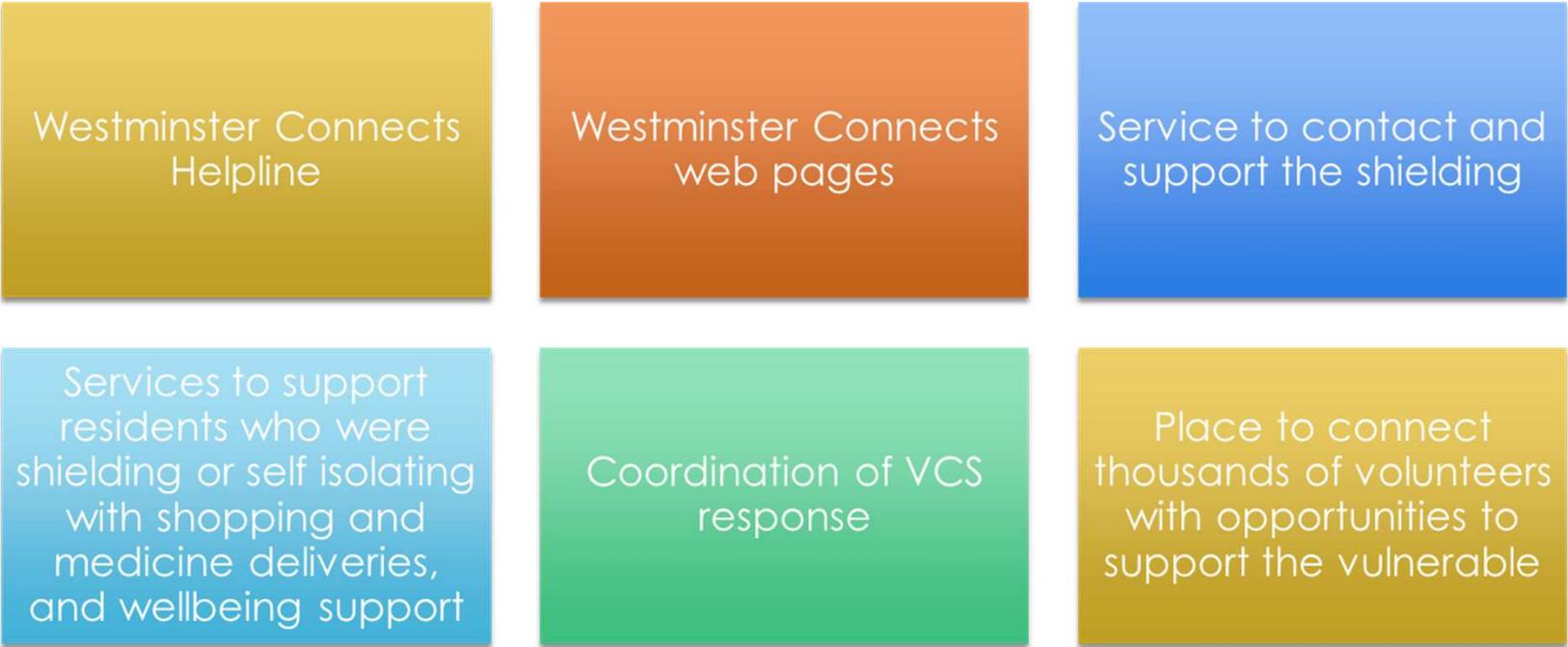


# 1. Introduction



# Overview of Service

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## Who we help

- ▶ Shielding residents: 10,000 extremely clinically vulnerable residents who were advised by the government and by their GPs to stay at home from March-July
- ▶ Residents who were self isolating because they had Covid-19 symptoms
- ▶ Residents who were experiencing hardship as a direct result of Covid-19, and needed referrals to foodbanks
- ▶ VCS organisations wanting to recruit volunteers or promote their services to residents
- ▶ Residents who wanted to volunteer to help



# Volunteers

- ▶ 3257 volunteers
- ▶ 27% with cars and willing to drive
- ▶ 40% bilingual (87 languages)
- ▶ 31% self disclosed DBS checks
- ▶ 89% Westminster Residents



# Voluntary and Community Organisations

- ▶ 44 organisations supported with volunteers through Westminster Connects

Size	Number	Staff numbers
Micro	23	0-9
Small	16	10-49
Medium	4	50-249
Large	2	250+



# Businesses

Highlights include:

- ▶ Priority access to supermarkets for 500+ volunteer shoppers.
- ▶ Donations of thousands of meals, food, vans and equipment to support the homeless, elderly isolating residents and low-income families.
- ▶ Financial donations from Lords, Shaftesbury, Chelsea Football Club, Bouygues and RMG to support food banks and food projects
- ▶ Easter eggs for the elderly gifted by M&S and Waitrose.
- ▶ The offer of Claridge's, the Berkeley Hotel, Puglia Restaurant, Capital Arches Group and the Grosvenor Hotel in supporting local food projects.
- ▶ Premises donated to support our volunteering projects at City of Westminster College and other charities – Abbey Community Centre.



# 2. Context



# Covid-19 Initial phase

- ▶ Lockdown
- ▶ Managing the huge swell in volunteer support offers
- ▶ Supporting the shielding initially without complete lists and without clarity about the role of the council in food provision
- ▶ Food shortages and access to food for vulnerable and isolating residents
- ▶ Government directives to councils
- ▶ Frequent changes in advice and information to communicate to residents



# Recovery and outbreak phase

- ▶ Established volunteer services – meal and shopping and medicine delivery, wellbeing chat, Connects as a platform
- ▶ Respond to desire to go beyond a Covid-19 response, and build on supporting the vulnerable
- ▶ Develop ways in which council services expand on volunteer opportunities to extend support to residents through volunteers
- ▶ Create a partnership between council, VCS and businesses through a connecting and enabling platform



# 3. Service impact & achievements



# Needs Met

- ▶ 49,000 needs met – including meals delivered, shopping delivered,
- ▶ 5,500 meals delivered to elderly isolating residents in sheltered accommodation
- ▶ Twice weekly shopping and delivery service allowing priority access to shops for volunteers to pick and collect shopping for isolating residents, run in the north and the south of the borough
- ▶ 150 prescriptions collected and delivered



# Volunteers Deployed

- ▶ 658 volunteers deployed into direct Westminster Connects services
- ▶ 353 volunteers deployed into VCS services
- ▶ 84 volunteers deployed to St Mary's Hospital
- ▶ 82 volunteers deployed to One Westminster check in and Chat service
- ▶ 43 volunteers deployed to North Paddington Foodbank
- ▶ 30 volunteers deployed to Age UK



# Community Organisation Feedback

*Following a call-out to support Octavia's befriending service, 50 volunteers stepped forward.*

*Octavia was delighted with the response and commented: "The response via Westminster Connects has been absolutely brilliant.*

*Our team is now working on matching existing applicants to befriendees, to reduce isolation at this critical time.*

*Westminster Connects has been really responsive since the crisis hit, so thank you to the whole team"*



# Feedback from volunteers

Really positive experience on the whole and I enjoyed chatting to the service users, and they said it helped, which is great

*Dedicating my time as a volunteer helps me to getting to know my community. I made new friends, expand my network, and boost my social skills.*

You can give as much or as little time as you have available. I don't feel pressured in any way and the backup is there when needed

*It has shown me how easy and practical volunteering can be in my local area whilst helping those who need it the most.*

*Worthwhile services that have positive effects for residents and the effects are very obvious/people receiving services are very vocal about how grateful they are*

*I live with someone vulnerable. This has given me opportunities to help without compromising health - thank you.*



# Community Intelligence Forum

- ▶ Purpose of the forum was to share intelligence between the community, community organisations and the council, and to coordinate our response
- ▶ Weekly meetings held between March and July
- ▶ Open invitation to attend – 35 organisations participated
- ▶ Themed discussions: wellbeing, impact on volunteers, food needs, social isolation, digital access, impact on BAME communities, employment support services and needs, domestic violence, supporting young people, reopening centres in Covid secure ways, support for older people, dementia and autism, Westminster Connects services
- ▶ Feedback – very useful way to find out what is happening, good to be included as a small organisation, learned a lot about services from the council and from other organisations



# Shopper Service

- ▶ Over 850 shopping requests lists delivered with an average price of single shopping list of £56
- ▶ Partnered with 4 local supermarkets; Waitrose & Partners, Sainsburys, Tesco Metro, M&S and ran the service twice weekly
- ▶ Bespoke shopping time for volunteers, dedicated check out till points and nectar cards with double points for our volunteers
- ▶ 2 operational service Hubs; 1 in Church Street and 1 in Pimlico
- ▶ 550 Volunteers deployed to the service and coordinated on both sites
- ▶ 620 Easter Chocolate Eggs delivered





Volunteers at South Hub, Dryburgh Community Hall

Volunteers delivering Easter Eggs to residents in Easter Bunny costumes



Shielding residents receiving Easter Eggs gift from WCC



Volunteers at North Hub, City of Westminster College



# Food Network

## What we've been doing to support the food needs of vulnerable residents?

**Food Network** – Set up weekly/fortnightly Food Network at the start of lockdown to bring together a network of food banks, community food projects, the Felix Project (Food Supplier) and council officers in Public Health, Housing, Children's Services and Economy, to help co-ordinate and manage work across Westminster to ensure people in need have access to food.

### Food Projects included:

- North Paddington Food Bank
- Westminster Food bank
- \* *Referrals to main foodbanks made via Westminster Connects helpline*
  
- Ebury Food Surplus – Homeless Britain
- Maida Hill Kitchen – Maida Hill Place Ltd
- Westminster Food for the Homeless – Unity Kitchen
- Westminster Emergency Food Parcels – Unity Kitchen
- WCC Berkeley Meals Service – Berkeley Hotel
- WCC Shopper Service – Westminster City Council
- The Avenues Food Project – The Avenues Youth Project

*\*Approx. 10 -15 other VCS organisations delivering food support across the borough*



# Food Provision

Name of Organisation/ Food Project	Food Project Offer	Resident Target Group	Service Ends
North Paddington Food Bank	Provides food for individuals and families, responding to every urgent request via WCC Connects	Mainly residents in North of borough	Increasing capacity and level of service
Westminster Food bank	Provides food for individuals and families, responding to every urgent request via WCC Connects	Mainly residents in South of borough	Reducing capacity and level of service
Ebury Food Surplus, Homeless Britain	Provides food to anyone in need and other projects with food sourced from - FareShare and City Harvest London and local business donations of pre-cooked food	Open to anyone in need, do not need a voucher	Increasing capacity and level of service
Maida Hill Kitchen, Maida Hill Place Ltd	Provided 100 meals on as many days as possible to a hospital. Also provides cooked food to a number of isolated and vulnerable residents in Little Venice and Maida Vale Wards	Doctors, Nurses and Staff working on three acute wards at St Mary's Hospital (ICU, Cardiovascular and Paediatric Oncology plus vulnerable residents in Little Venice and Maida Vale wards	Reducing capacity and level of service
Westminster Food for the Homeless, Unity Kitchen	Provided Hot meals	The Homeless	Ended 26 <sup>th</sup> June
Westminster Emergency Food Parcels, Unity Kitchen	Provided Emergency Food Parcels	Emergency food requests	Ended 26 <sup>th</sup> June
WCC Berkeley Meals Service, Berkeley Hotel	The Berkeley hotel produced 250 meals a day, 7 days a week, focus in the south of the city	Residents in sheltered Housing	Ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June
The Avenues Food Project, The Avenues Youth Project	Provided 1 cooked meal a day for up to 100 families who were part of The Avenues project, many on free school meals. Plus provided food to a school who are looking after children of key workers	Members of the Youth project and their families	Ends 17 <sup>th</sup> July
WCC Shopper Service	WCC Connects volunteer led food shopper service launched 3 <sup>rd</sup> April	Self isolating residents, families not able to physically get shopping	Downscaled in June to a service for elderly residents who did not have care support due to social distancing and residents who had physical or Mental Health needs

# Food intelligence Dashboard

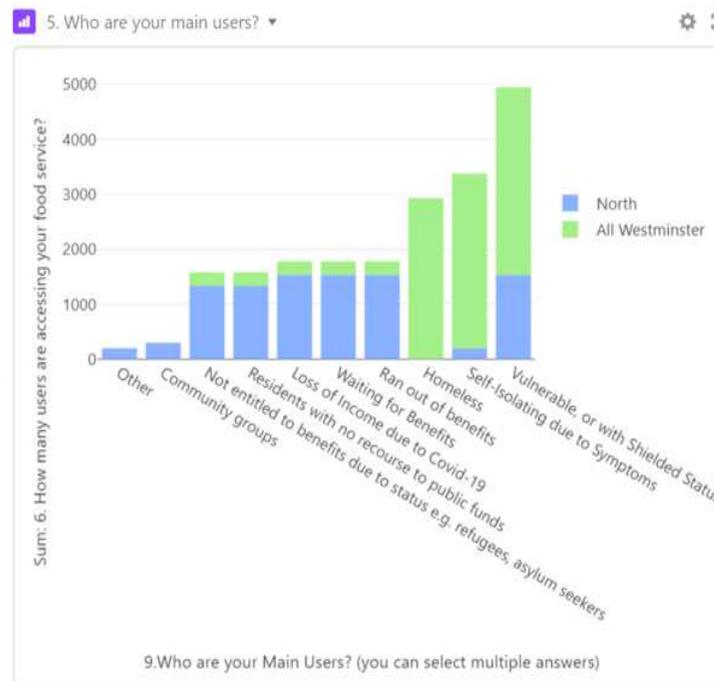
**Food Intelligence Dashboard** – Produced fortnightly dashboard to help us understand data across the food projects, respond to needs plus help inform a strategy going forward

## Number of Users accessing these food services:

01/05 – 14/05 – **9287 Users** / 2284 Households  
15/05 – 28/05 – 9092 Users / 1707 Households  
29/05 – 11/06 – 7488 Users / 1237 Households  
12/06 – 25/06 – 5042 Users / 1082 Households  
26/06 – 09/07 – **2021 Users** / 1082 Households

The top 3 main users of these food services are those **vulnerable or with shielded status, self isolating due to symptoms** and **the homeless** mainly across the North And All Westminster

**Main Users:** Single people and families



\*New top emerging cohorts of Users accessing these services are those with no recourse to public funds, not entitled to benefits due to status and those who have ran out of benefits

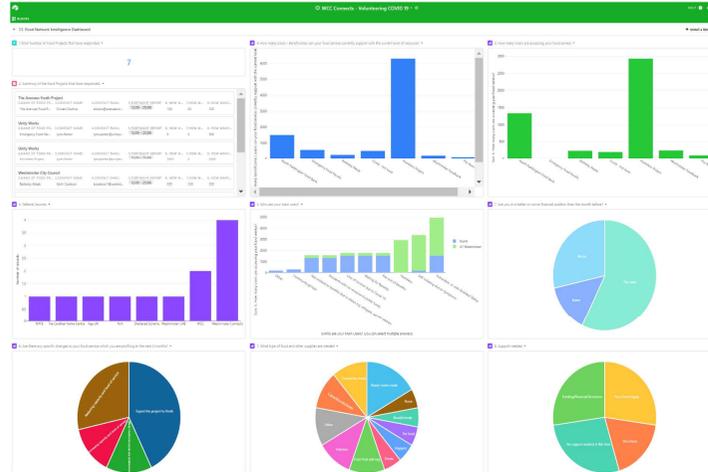


# Food Network Legacy

## Food Network

### Outputs:

- Food Network Intelligence dashboard**  
 To help us understand data across the food projects, respond to needs plus inform a strategy going forward.
- Food Network Tracker**  
 To monitor and track operational and strategic issues across the food projects
- Food Provision list**  
 For WCC Connects/ WCC staff to use as a referral tool for residents in financial hardship



Name of Organisation / Food Project	Name of Lead / Contact	Operational Issues	Strategic Issues
		29/05 - 11/06	29/05 - 11/06
THE AVENUES YOUTH PROJECT - THE AVENUES FOOD PROJECT	Fabian Sharp	None	Long term viability of the project will sustained income and food supplies purpose. Initial grants and donations may not last beyond the end of the Holidays.
NORTH-PADDINGTON FOOD BANK - NPFB W9, W10, NW8	James Quayle	Access to storage, office and distribution spaces.	Scaling up and planning the development organisation whilst responding to h
WESTMINSTER CHAPEL FOOD BANK	Heather Neuhville	Return to work for furloughed staff, continuing to provide a delivery service	Planning for a return to having clerks to collect food parcels
UNITY WORKS - EMERGENCY FOOD PARCELS and PRODUCING MEALS FOR THE HOMELESS	Denise Largin / Lynn Parker	None / None	Not enough bookings / Not enough Numbers are dropping
SHeltered HOUSING OFFER and BERKELEY HOTEL MEALS	Keith Cookson	Some challenges with volunteers returning to work and ending of parking waivers. Having insufficient bags for volunteers to carry the meals was an issue but has been resolved.	No significant issues - ending of se managing with Comms etc, but has through this ahead of original anticipated, no real concerns. Some of this may need alternative provision via food bank or Westminster Connect

### Food services for people in financial hardship (6/5/20)

#### Food Banks

##### 1)North Paddington Food Bank

Base: WECH

Satellites: Avenues, Greenhouse Sports

Serves people in financial hardship in Paddington, Queens Park church St, Maida Vale

Access: through Westminster Connects

##### 2)Westminster Chapel Food Bank

Base: Westminster Chapel, supported by Trussel Trust

Serves people in financial hardship across the borough

Access: Through westminster connects

Emergency parcels of food

#### Other Organisations delivering food

##### 1)Abbey Centre (30)

Deliveries of Hot/Cooked Meals

##### 2)Age UK (30) -deliveries of food packages and shopping for people 60+

##### 3)St Mary of the Angels

Delivering shopping to about 12 vulnerable people (Mixture of Wand C and Westminster residents)



# 4. Lessons learned



# Shielding

- ▶ Decision to contact all the shielding by phone required the redeployment of large numbers of staff
- ▶ 25% were not contactable by phone and were only reached by letter
- ▶ 65% indicated that they were able to take care of their own needs themselves or with family and friends support
- ▶ 10% required help from the council for food support, shopping, wellbeing support, medicine delivery
- ▶ In the future use InteractiveVoice Recognition (automated calls) to directly reach those who need help and support



# Volunteers

- ▶ Volunteers are able and willing to undertake multiple tasks and activities.
- ▶ Volunteers were registered in excess of the opportunities created
- ▶ Creating volunteer opportunities then drove service design ahead of efficiency, effectiveness and resident need
- ▶ Volunteers who were not used immediately felt let down
- ▶ Learn how to message and manage expectations with volunteers



# Volunteer Survey Findings





# Opportunities

- ▶ VCS welcomed the council role in coordinating information, volunteer referrals, and as a gateway for residents to services, and welcomes working more closely in partnership
- ▶ Companies looked for support in making contributions of skilled volunteers and funding to residents and community organisations and looked to the council to direct support to where the needs are.
- ▶ Food support – during the first two months of the pandemic our foodbanks quadrupled the number of households they were supporting and switched to a delivery model.
- ▶ The council supported them with practical problem solving – additional volunteers, vans, drivers; refrigerated storage; funding from companies; support to find venues to store and deliver food from, and prepare for collection; helpline administration of referrals to the foodbanks.
- ▶ This enabled a rapid escalation and downsizing of the food delivery service across the council, and a collective understanding of levels of food poverty and need in the borough.



# Systems

- ▶ IT systems are vital to the delivery of services. The CRM and the volunteer and VCS Airtable system were both set up rapidly and developed dynamically as the needs and requirements changed.
- ▶ It was possible to agree quickly data sharing agreements which both protected individuals and shared data across organisations quickly and appropriately.
- ▶ Government and NHS databases were full of duplicates which required additional time and support to cleanse, and constantly changed our weekly reports because initial data sets were inaccurate.
- ▶ Setting up efficient payment schemes for the shopping service rapidly because of the inability to use cash because of covid-19 restrictions was a challenge. This led to some of the early shopping payments being unrecoverable (£6,000).
- ▶ This meant that the council made a donation of xxx meals to those shielding or self isolating early on in the pandemic, helping people to maintain self isolation and reducing the spread of Covid-19.
- ▶ In future shopping services will use supermarket systems like click and collect so we do not need to get directly involved in payments
- ▶ However, volunteers and our shopper service provided a valuable service for residents that were unable to get a delivery slot, were unable or unwilling to make card payment.



# Council

- ▶ The council was able to mobilise staff to work outside of their normal roles rapidly and effectively
- ▶ We were able to see agile and responsive working across departments, and implement this during home working.
- ▶ Staff responded well to the urgency of the demand and to the level of direct contact with residents, and valued the experience of being able to make a difference to people's lives



# 5. Connects Vision



# Connects: Enabling Role

- ▶ The Connects vision is to build on the remarkable response of the community to the Covid-19 emergency to build a better community. 5000 volunteers from the Westminster residents, council staff and companies will be engaged in impactful activity that makes a genuine and accountable difference to the community.
- ▶ The Council will take an enabling role – which ensures volunteers are match-made with community organisations and also the residents that need help at home. The programme will develop through partnership with community organisations, supporting their many community activities, and in partnership with companies who want to make a difference with their time and resources in Westminster. It will build on the many existing relationships and activities, and transform them into a vibrant force for good, working together to support the community.
- ▶ Our vision for Connects is to network in separate volunteering programmes which exist across the City alongside our own platform and activity to promote volunteering. This network approach will facilitate a better experience for volunteers across the City and support greater impact by working as ‘One Team’.
- ▶ This will be enhanced by a platform which enables volunteers, organisations and businesses to connect directly, and innovative campaigns which demonstrate impact.



# Aims

- ▶ Connects will be the way in which the Council enables the City for All plans to take root and bear fruit in the community. Volunteer opportunities will be developed that support the priorities:
- ▶ Greener and Cleaner – tackling the climate emergency
- ▶ Vibrant communities – making sure everyone has access to the opportunities of the City
- ▶ Smart City – digital access and skills



# Objectives

- ▶ To match between volunteers who want to help with people who are vulnerable and want support
- ▶ To support the VCS to access resources which help them as organisations to transform the lives of residents
- ▶ To develop the capacity within council departments to extend tailored support to residents through volunteer roles
- ▶ To enhance and promote the social value added by companies through links with volunteering, funding and professional support to the VCS
- ▶ To promote the impact of volunteering through innovative campaigns and design
- ▶ To maintain the capacity to respond to changes in Covid-19 emergency response
- ▶ To link into the business volunteering community – and focus them on the most important projects in Westminster



# How Will We Know If It Is Successful

- ▶ Residents supported by volunteer activities
- ▶ Volunteers registered, assigned, trained and actively engaged
- ▶ Number of volunteer hours
- ▶ Numbers of VCS and company organisations who are members of the partnership
- ▶ Council Services/departments with active volunteer projects
- ▶ Number and range of volunteer opportunities



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## Communities Services Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020

**Classification:** General Release

**Title:** Contact centre performance and update

**Report of:** Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director of Finance and Resources

**Cabinet Member Portfolio** Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital

**Wards Involved:** All

**Policy Context:** City for All

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### 1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report gives an overview of the main contact centres performance. At the last meeting in January, it was reported that a review of the Council's contact centres was being undertaken as part of the Customer Experience Programme. An update on this project is also given below.

### 2. Contact centre overview

2.1 Agilisys manage two contact centres for the Council. A day team which is based in Weston Super Mare (Monday to Fridays 8 am – 6 pm) and an out of hours team based in Rochdale (Monday to Fridays 5 pm – 9 am and 24/7 weekends and bank holidays). They handle calls and emails for many key Council services including:

Day team:

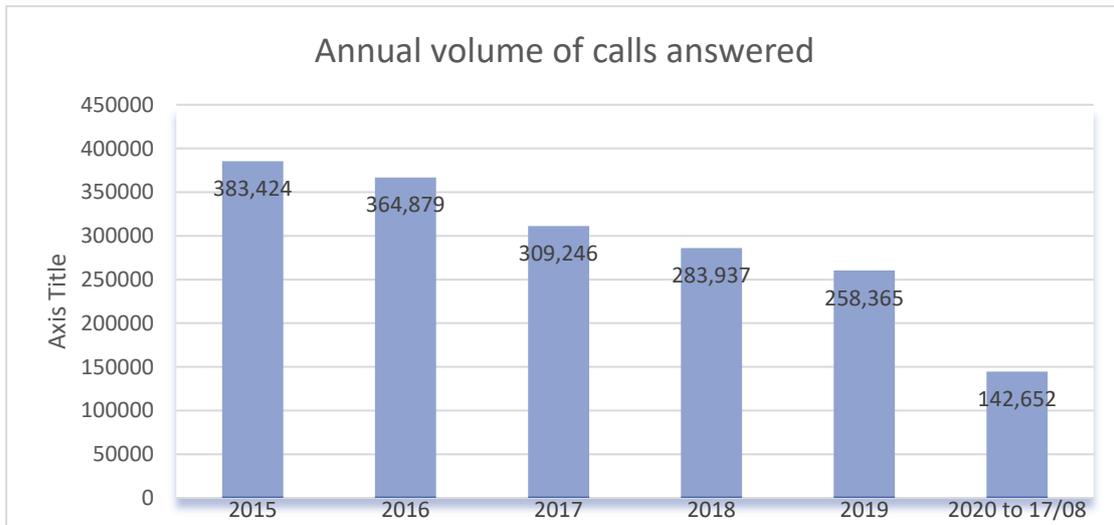
Adults	Libraries
Building control	Licensing (premises/streets)
Carers emergency cards	Noise
Electoral services	Planning
Emergency contingency planning	Pest control
FoI/GDPR	Rough sleeping
Free school meals	Residential housing
Food safety	Special events
Health & safety	Trading standards
Highways management/licensing	Waste & recycling

Housing repairs (new/emergency)	Waste & litter enforcement
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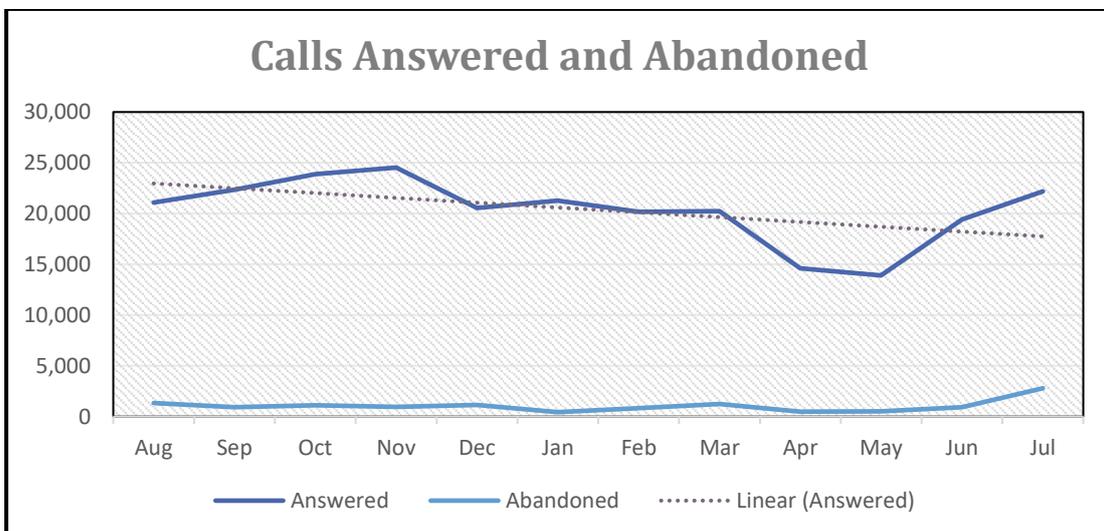
Out of hours/emergency team:

Adults	Highways (P1's)
Carers emergency cards	Homelessness/temporary accommodation
Dangerous structures	Housing repairs
Emergency contingency planning	Noise
Emergency duty social worker	Rough sleeping

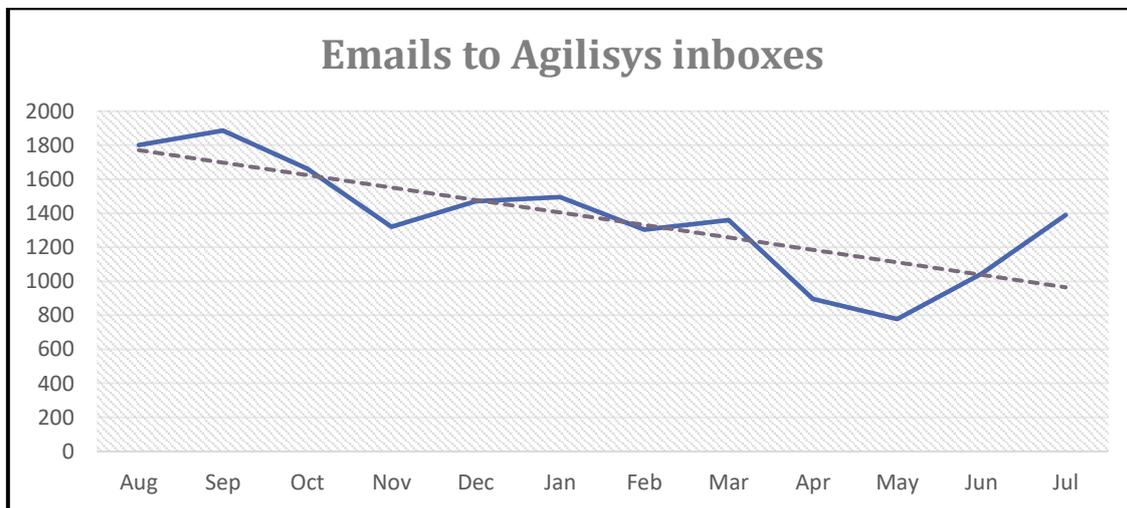
2.2 The trend for call volumes is decreasing year on year as can be seen from the chart below but the contact centres still handle on average 18.5k calls a month during the day/week and 5k calls out of hours.



2.3 The graph below shows the total volume of calls answered in and out of hours from August 2019 – July 2020. In March, volumes remained more or less the same as people began to understand how Covid would affect them and seeking information and support. In April and May, volumes reduced significantly as some services were 'closed' and officers redeployed to support vulnerable residents and key frontline services that were still open and very busy. The website and voicemail messages also directed customers to other agencies and organisations where appropriate which helped manage call volumes in some areas.



- 2.4 In June, the daytime contact centre took over the Westminster Connects calls – the number set up to specifically support vulnerable and shielded residents. July saw volumes go up again to more or less pre-Covid numbers as some restrictions were lifted and Westminster services started to 're-open'. This did cause service levels to drop slightly and this was also compounded by some agents needing to take leave/break from their working environment.
- 2.5 The graph below shows the number of emails that come into the contact centre. These are from 11 service specific email addresses published on the website e.g. [environmentalactionline@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:environmentalactionline@westminster.gov.uk) [highwaysmanagement@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:highwaysmanagement@westminster.gov.uk), from emails that are generated via forms not yet integrated into back office systems and also from sources such as the national FixMyStreets website and the Food Standards Agency.
- 2.6 Volumes reduced when the ReportIt functionality was introduced but the contact centre still get a lot of emails which they either then log into a system or have to forward to a service to respond. There is currently a review to look at all the emails on the website and to reduce these where a structured and/or an integrated form could be better utilised.



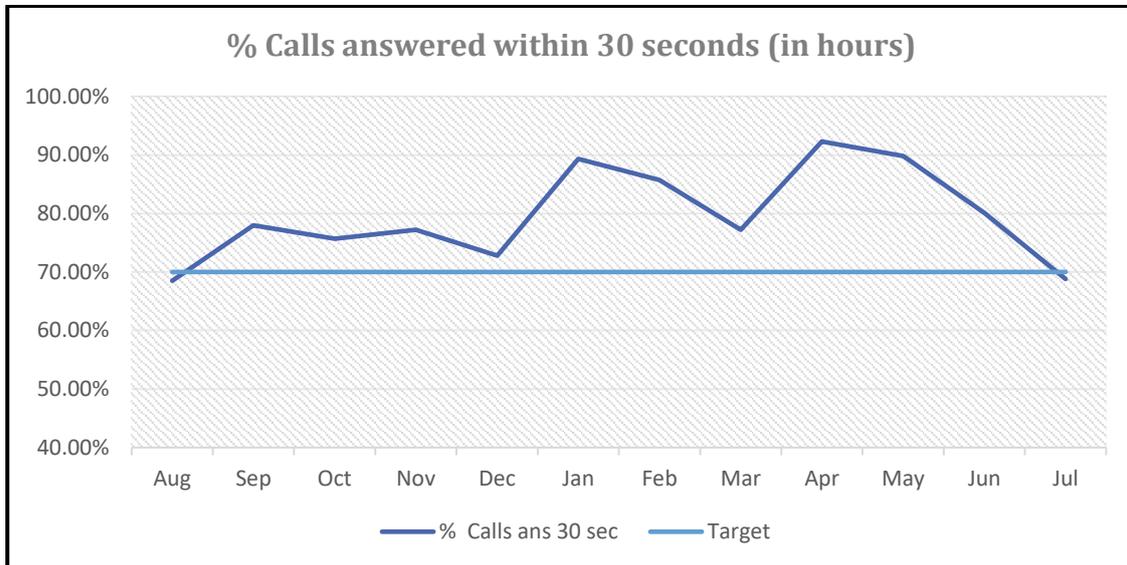
### 3. Contact centre performance

- 3.1 The table below shows the contractual KPI's and performance against target since January.

KPI Description	Target	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
<b>Call handling</b>								
Percentage of calls answered (in hours)	95%	94.50%	98.80%	95.80%	98.10%	97.70%	95.10%	86.90%
Percentage of calls answered (out of hours)	95%	95.70%	95.30%	89.50%	94.30%	94.00%	97.00%	96.10%
Percentage of calls answered in 30 seconds (in hours)	70%	69.50%	90.10%	78.20%	95.50%	93.20%	76.92%	68.80%
Percentage of calls answered in 30 seconds (out of hours)	70%	82.30%	86.20%	74.10%	85.60%	84.10%	90.20%	86.30%
Maximum wait time (in hours)	8 minutes	27 mins 37 secs	12 mins 13 secs	8 mins 38 secs	8 mins 37 secs	15 mins 58 secs	24 mins 51 secs	30 mins 13 secs
Maximum wait time (out of hours)	15 minutes	20 mins 47 secs	13 mins 49 secs	25 mins 41 secs	11 mins 36 secs	17 mins 40 secs	11 mins 31 secs	15 mins 40 secs
<b>Email handling</b>								
Emails handled within 72 hours	90%	99.72%	98.90%	100%	98.71%	98.50%	100%	100%
<b>Quality</b>								

Customer satisfaction	90%	98.50%	93%	95%	94%	95%	94%	94%
Critical/non-critical complaints /feedback	<5 critical <10 non-critical	3 critical 0 non-critical	6 critical 1 non-critical	0 critical 0 non-critical	2 critical 1 non-critical	2 critical 0 non-critical	1 critical 0 non-critical	2 Critical 0 Non-Critical

3.2 Overall, performance has been good. As can be seen from the table above and the graph below, the percentage of calls answered within 30 seconds in hours dipped in July due to an increase in call volumes when some key services re-opened e.g. registrars.



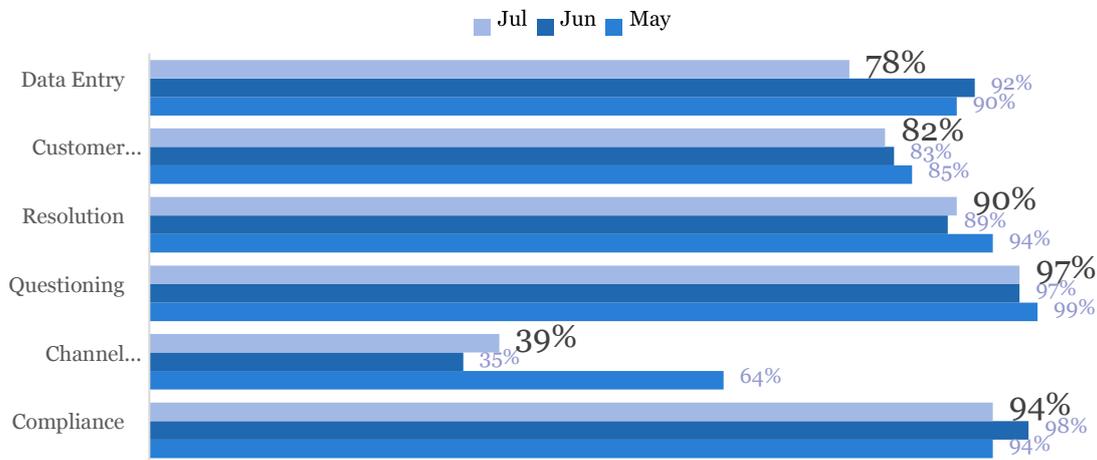
3.3 The table shows maximum wait times of 8 and 15 minutes. This means that one caller in a week will have chosen to hold for that maximum amount of time. This is not the best indication of overall wait time performance. The graph below shows the average wait time which is how long the majority of callers will have waited to be answered. Again, this has risen as services re-open and call volumes have increased.



#### 4. Call quality monitoring

4.1 Each month, Agilisys will score 5 randomly chosen calls for each agent. Any calls that fail a criteria are fed back to the individual agent in their 1-2-1's and continuous fails are closely monitored by managers.

4.2 As can be seen from the graph below, channel shift has not scored very highly as agents have failed to offer/promote an online option. Some additional training and prompts have been given to try and improve this score. Data entry has also seen a lower score in July and this has been down to the volume of calls increasing and agents being less careful when entering data into systems. This has been picked up with individual agents.



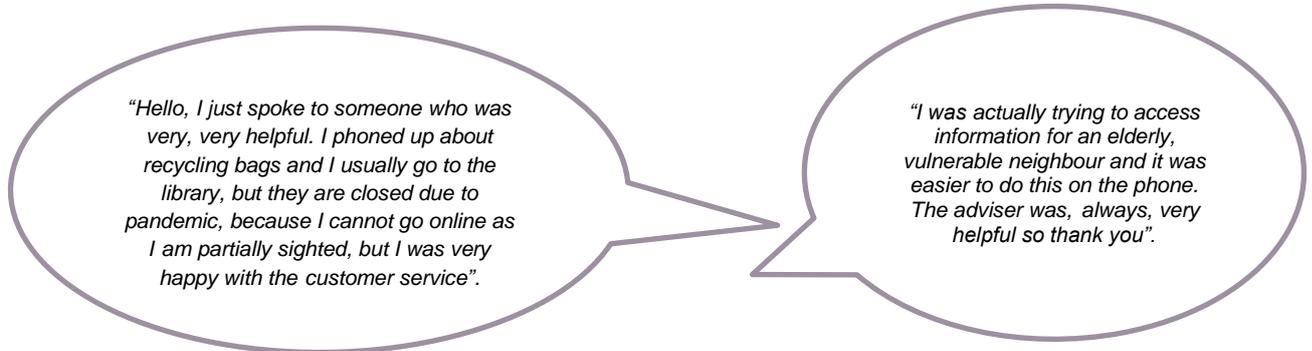
## 5. Customer satisfaction

5.1 Agilisys monitor customer satisfaction with the in hours team using a post-call survey. This is offered to callers for one week in each month and results collated and shared. Over the last few months survey completion has been much lower (approx. 280-300) but this increased to 496 in July as call volumes increased. Results remain high and a breakdown showing the number of surveys completed in July by service is below:

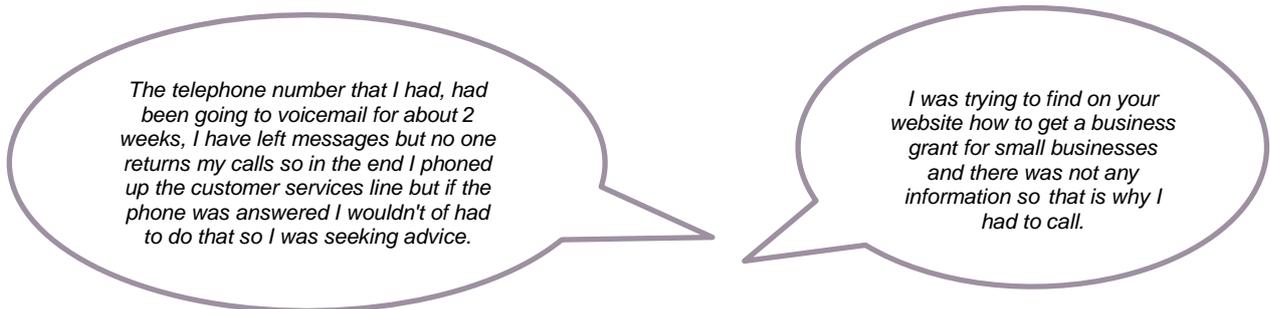
Service	Total completed surveys	Satisfied	Why did you choose to call us today?			
			Did not know information was online	No Internet access	Could not find information	My Account Issue
Switchboard	160	100.0%	16.4%	41.4%	31.4%	10.7%
Registrars	115	95.7%	18.4%	17.5%	55.3%	8.7%
Rubbish/recycling	64	100.0%	15.1%	47.2%	35.8%	1.9%
Uncategorised	41	100.0%	13.5%	51.4%	35.1%	0.0%
Planning	20	100.0%	0.0%	26.7%	73.3%	0.0%
Bulky waste	14	100.0%	7.7%	46.2%	46.2%	0.0%
Highways/road management	12	100.0%	30.0%	30.0%	40.0%	0.0%
Libraries	11	100.0%	22.2%	33.3%	44.4%	0.0%
Noise	10	100.0%	33.3%	11.1%	33.3%	22.2%
Pest control	9	100.0%	28.6%	14.3%	42.9%	14.3%
Carers emergency scheme	8	100.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Electoral services	7	100.0%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	0.0%
Licensing premises	7	100.0%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%
Adult services	4	100.0%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%
Environmental housing	3	100.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%
Special events	3	100.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Licensing streets	2	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Building control	1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Highways licensing	1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

Contingency planning	1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
OoH Switchboard	1	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Free School Meals	1	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Waste Litter Enforcement	1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

5.2 Of the surveys completed about 25% of those callers will also leave a comment at the end. The majority of these comments are very positive:



5.3 Where the comments are not so positive, these are quite often because the customer had not got what they wanted from a Council service or had problems finding information on the website. This is fed back to the services and the web team.



## 6. Other Council contact centres performance

6.1 The Council also has four other key service contact centres and a summary of performance for July is shown below with some additional commentary on how they have performed over the last few months:

	Volume of Calls Answered (July 2020 and +/- since last month)	Percentage of Calls Answered (July 2020 and +/- since last month)	Target Calls Answered	Average Wait Times (July 2020 and +/- since last month)	Target Wait Time	Maximum wait time	Average Handle Time (July 2020 and +/- since last month)
<b>In hours (Agilisys)</b>	17,070 (+ 14%)	86.9% (- 10.1%)	95%	52 secs (+ 39 secs)	70% in 30 secs	30 mins 13 secs (+ 5 mins 22 secs)	3 mins 34 secs (- 10 secs)
<b>Out of hours (Agilisys)</b>	5,099 (+ 7%)	95.6% (- 0.9%)	95%	18 secs (+ 5 secs)	70% in 30 secs	15 mins 40 secs (+ 4 mins 59 secs)	3 mins 23 secs (- 8 secs)

<b>Revenues &amp; benefits (Capita)</b>	14,254 (+ 14%)	98.84% + 0.28%	80%	40 secs - 23.89	-	6 mins 21 secs	-
<b>Housing (Westminster)</b>	19,597 (+11%)	94% (-2%)	92%	35 secs (+12 secs)	70% in 30 seconds	8 mins 31 (+ 33 secs)	-
<b>Parking (NSL)</b>	9, 844 (+ 15%)	85.5% (- 6 %)	80% (in 30 seconds)	143 secs (+ 52 secs)	30 Seconds	329 secs (- 22 secs)	-
<b>Housing Solutions (RMG)</b>	6,346 (- 9%)	88% (- 2%)	No target	16 secs (same)	No target	11 minutes	228 secs (+ 21%)

### 6.1.1 Capita (Revenues & Benefits)

All call center staff continue to work from home following the pandemic. Calls continue to be answered within SLA at 80% and this is being closely monitored. The staff available to take calls is usually forecast with a clear recovery timeline, however the pandemic has made changes to the recovery plans. Call volumes are steady and continue to be monitored.

### 6.1.2 WCC Housing

July saw the implementation of a phased return of our repairs service. Although a reduced offer, call volumes matched those of peak months such as January and February. An increase of 11% call volume versus the previous month demonstrated customers were more confident in allowing contractors into their homes. The contact centre performed well against the higher call demand, answering 77% of calls within SLA and answering 94% of total calls offered. Customer satisfaction remains at 5% above target at 90% and has increased 4% versus pre-lockdown scores, highlighting the training provided in the months of lockdown has paid great dividends.

### 6.1.3 NSL (Parking)

The contact centre has shifted entirely to home working with only minimal impact to service. The answered in 30 seconds is significantly lower in July as the call volumes have returned to a more normal level.

### 6.1.4 RMG (Housing Solutions)

All contact centre staff have been working from home since mid-March. Advisors are using mobile devices which means connection is slower (speed of answer) and the system call description code to calculate call resolution (as opposed to transferred) cannot be entered using a mobile device. There have been numerous IT issues with connectivity when logging in from home and also on to the contact centre system itself. When connected, they have generally had full access to all systems. However, staff have worked well to achieve 88% of calls answered with the longest queue being just over 11 minutes and the average queue time being 16 seconds. Call volumes have significantly increased (50%) since April. The level of advice, information, assistance and signposting has remained effective.

## **7. Contact centres review project update**

- 7.1 The Council has 10 contact centres that receive just over 900,000 calls each year. The main contact centre (outsourced to Agilisys as detailed above) is, in most cases, the first point of contact. It is a generalist contact centre, servicing a wide range of Council services. The other contact centres are in Housing, Social Care, Revenues and Benefits, Parking, Commercial Waste and School Admissions. These other contact centres, some outsourced, are run by the respective departments as an integral part of services. As expected in a decentralised model, the operating models are varied and each contact centre is on a different trajectory in the use of technology platforms.
- 7.2 The Contact Centre Review project was established to ensure customers receive a consistent experience when contacting the Council and investigate opportunities to improve the commercial models, leverage technology and streamline operations.
- 7.3 After the initial research and analysis phase was completed and options identified, the Customer Contact Centre Review was given formal approval by the Corporate Change Board on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to progress the design of an assisted services hub operating model. This will include looking at the other contact centres that deliver Council services as mentioned in 3.1 and where appropriate transitioning these into the new operating model in a phased manner.
- 7.4 We have commenced a proof of concept for one service to test the assisted services hub approach, which will inform the detailed design of the operating model and specification of requirements. In the meantime, the contract with Agilisys is in the process of being extended for up to 24 months, which will enable the new model to settle.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Paula Norris  
07931 543925 pnorris@westminster.gov.uk**

### **APPENDICES:**

None.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.



## Community and Business Planning Policy & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	14 September 2020
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	2020/21 Work Programme and Action Tracker
<b>Report of:</b>	Ezra Wallace, Director of Policy and Projects
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Cabinet Member for Business and Planning and Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	All
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	Lizzie Barrett x 3103 ebarrett@westminster.gov.uk

### 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**  
Community Services Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>ROUND TWO</b> <b>14 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 including response to Access to Culture Task Group recommendations.	Councillor Paul Swaddle, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital
Westminster Connects	To receive an update on what Westminster Connects has achieved but also what it teaches us about how we interact with the VCS sector and volunteers going forward.	Christine Mead, Public Health Strategic Commissioner
Westminster's Contact Centers	To receive an update on Westminster's contact centres and hear about how these services were maintained over lockdown.	Paula Norris, Customer Engagement Manager

<b>ROUND THREE</b> <b>9 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 Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business and Planning
Employment, training and skills	Explore the Council's approach to employment, training and skills in light of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic and consider how this contributes to the Council's overarching objective of revitalising the local economy.	
Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES)	To receive an update on progress against recommendations in the WAES strategic review.	

**ROUND FOUR**  
**1 February 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 Paul Swaddle, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital
Support for live arts sector due to the impact of COVID-19	Review council's approach to supporting the live arts sector in the wake of financial struggles due to the COVID-19 pandemic.	
Neighborhood forums	Review the council's approach to supporting neighborhood forums.	

**ROUND FIVE**  
**8 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 Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business and Planning
Major place shaping programmes	Review one of the council's major place shaping (Harrow Road area, Soho area, Paddington area) and consider how these support the council's C4A and renewal objectives.	
Council's approach to the voluntary and community sector including VCS rent charging	To review the Council's approach to the voluntary and community sector including VCS rent charging in council properties.	

**ROUND SIX**  
**26 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 Paul Swaddle, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital
Digital inclusion	Review the Council's approach to digital inclusion and assess the	

	impact in reducing digital inequality.	
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<b>UNALLOCATED ITEMS 2020/21</b>		
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Reasons &amp; objective for item</b>	<b>Represented by</b>
Planning review	To receive an update on how the recommendations of the planning review have been implemented.	(Written update)
Climate change and planning policy	Review and provide feedback on how the environmental policies in the City Plan can be delivered.	
Planning white paper	Receive update on the impact of the planning white paper on future planning policy/decisions	
City Plan	Review City Plan and work streams that will come out of it.	
Create Church Street	Review first round of Create Church Street and	

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Community Services Business and Planning P&S Committee Action Tracker

ROUND ONE 8 JUNE 2020		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Item 4: Cabinet Member Update	The committee requested information on how much of the £15,000 spent on shopping as part of the Westminster Connects service had been returned to the council by service users.	In progress
	The committee requested further information on the future plans for play streets.	Completed
	The committee requested information on the support being provided by the council to foodbanks in Westminster.	Completed

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