

Housing, Finance and Customer Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Portfolio:	Housing and Customer Services
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Priorities for 2018/19

- To continually ensure improvements in performance, particularly on repairs and customer services with our housing stock whilst we follow through on our intention to bring CityWest Homes in-house
- Ensure fire safety programmes are implemented to the Council's housing stock
- To Improve and expand on services around homelessness prevention
- Continue the digitisation of the Council's customer services and modernise the council's

1. CityWest Homes (CWH)

1.1 CWH structure and governance

Following concerns highlighted by residents and ward councillors about CityWest Homes' performance, Westminster City Council commissioned a review of CityWest Homes and its oversight by the Council. This review has highlighted that the organisation is failing to provide the right level of service to council housing residents. The Task Group set up by the Policy and Scrutiny Committee in June has also arrived independently at similar conclusions.

Whilst these reviews have been underway, the Council has introduced immediate improvement actions to address failings. This has included changes to the customer contact centre and action to address issues with the repairs service such as a new team focused on fixing leaks.

However, we are not confident that there has been sufficient improvement and therefore, in order to make the step change required for residents in how our housing is managed these improvement and following these two reviews, the Council intends to bring the service back in house. This means we will move from arms-length management to direct council control of the management of our social housing. My overriding focus is to place our residents at the centre of the services we provide. We have to recognise that, particularly during recent change programmes in major works and customer services, some services dropped to a standard that was below what is acceptable to our residents.

The formal decision as to whether or not to bring the management of housing services back in house will be taken by the Council's Cabinet in October 2018. This will be followed by a consultation and we look forward to working with residents to hear your views, agree your priorities and improve services in the future.

1.2 Performance

CWH performance is monitored against a Performance Framework of 28 KPIs agreed at the beginning of each financial year. In addition, this year a further 25 indicators are measured and reviewed each month between CWH operational managers and the client team. The main areas of focus are the contact centre and repairs services.

1.3 Contact centre performance

The Contact Centre has delivered a good level of performance this financial year, but dipped in August.

For the year to date April–July, first contact resolution, average wait time, call abandonment rates and calls answered in 30 seconds all delivered within target and average wait times have consistently been below 1 minute and 20 seconds (1:20).

The August decline in performance was due to annual leave, sickness absence and a number of vacant posts.

In order to improve performance a recruitment and training plan is in place to address the shortfall in headcount and to additionally deliver the winter recruitment plan to manage the additional volumes forecast for this period

	April	May	June	July	August
Calls offered	19819	19322	19847	20195	20346
First contact resolution	69%	74%	65%	62%	62%
Average wait time	1:15	1:02	1:19	1:06	2:44
% calls answered in 30 seconds	69.17%	71%	65%	69%	46%
% calls abandoned	3.9%	3.4%	4.6%	4.0%	9.7%

The training plan will enable the following additional improvements:

- Customer Service training to improve the quality of customer contact
- Upskilling of existing staff to handle additional call types

- Improved repairs knowledge to improve the quality of repairs diagnostics

A review of the existing contact centre processes is in progress to ensure that the right services are available to residents.

In October a new service quality framework will be launched that will set the standards for service delivery in the contact centre.

In addition to call handling, the contact centre also manages the on-line offer. To date 728 Residents have registered to use the My City West Portal with a total of 434 service requests resolved.

The following services are the most requested via My City West;

- Repair – 31%
- Update personal detail – 27%
- Complaint – 19%
- Contact details – 14%

During the transition period I will ensure that the improvements that have already been made in performance are maintained.

1.4 Repairs performance

Repairs performance is not yet at target levels but has improved, with work underway to return service levels to the quality required.

A comprehensive Repairs Improvement Plan has been written and agreed with main contractor Morgan Sindall. Area teams are being formed and Morgan Sindall resource is being allocated to mirror area repair delivery and plan for winter delivery.

Weekly operations meetings focus on pre and post inspections to ensure repairs are accurately diagnosed and work undertaken meets quality standards.

Tenant satisfaction with the repair service has plateaued at 80-82% and a review of tenant feedback and the current repairs process is underway to analyse the customer journey in greater detail and pinpoint areas for improvement.

A detailed review of borough-wide repairs relating to leaks has been completed, which has enabled the department to create an informed Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) programme. The review included the last 5 year's repairs data which has been analysed alongside the capital programme by Morgan Sindall. This should reduce the number of avoidable repairs and associated works in the forthcoming winter period.

The key focus is to rebuild confidence in the repairs service and ensure excellent service delivery.

1.5 Estate Management Offer

A key part of CWH' new service model was for housing management staff to be freed from call handling to visit estates, to manage the upkeep of the environment and infrastructure as well as to provide support to residents.

Sufficient progress has not been made in this area and CWH teams are now collectively reviewing their services and resources to design a new estate offer, to meet the original objective of the transformation programme. The new offer will be developed with residents and other stakeholders, and is expected to include subjects such as estate inspections and service standards and will result in an estate plan highlighting the short, medium and long term plans for each estate.

1.6 Parking – Use of Traffic Management Orders (TMO)

Local Authorities use Traffic Management Orders on public highways and public local authority car parks, which allow the issue of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) for unauthorised parking, under statutory powers. Since October 2012, owners of private land, have used non-statutory 'parking notices' and charges. The Council's traffic management arrangements do not cover HRA land, which is effectively treated as private land. The Government has taken the view that HRA land should be regulated in the same way as public highways, i.e. through Traffic Orders.

To address this, Westminster's parking team and CityWest Homes have been working towards aligning estate parking controls with the Council's on-street enforcement arrangements through Traffic Orders, so that tickets can be issued and charges recovered. While this won't affect parking charges for residents, it will mean a change in policy in how permits are administered and how spaces are allocated.

The implementation of entirely new Traffic Orders is in progress, involving: production of technical documentation; resident consultation; approvals by Cabinet Member and the installation of lines and signage.

Informal consultation, involving a factsheet and questionnaire, is currently in progress on all estates, (excluding priority areas where consultation completed earlier in the year). It is designed to collect residents' views on the proposals, as well as meeting the consultation requirements of s105 of the Housing Act. The questions asked cover the preferred hours of operation for parking controls, space allocation and the provision of parking for non-residents.

Over 150 responses have been received so far. Cabinet Member approval to proceed to the next stage of statutory consultation will be sought after the informal consultation is complete and due consideration has been taken of the feedback in the design of the proposed arrangements. This is expected to be in early October, with implementation expected to begin in November/December 2018.

1.7 Estate Services Contracts

WCC, CWH staff and a small team of residents have now completed the evaluation of tenders for estate services contracts for block and estate cleaning, grounds maintenance, concierge and security services across the City. These are due to be moderated and finalised at the end of September.

Leaseholders will receive section 20 notices and be invited to submit feedback, and tenants will be notified of the proposed award as soon as this is known.

1.8 Resident communications

CWH hosts news, opportunities and service updates on cwh.org.uk on a regular basis and promote all content through Twitter, where the follower base continues to increase and engagement remains consistent.

This information is also promoted monthly to 10,000+ residents through City Voice CWH's online newsletter, available through the website and e-mailed to residents. Circulation continues to climb with each edition published. The newsletter helps bring residents to CWH's website; demonstrates that there is an interest in the information provided and an appetite for on-line communication.

All previous editions can be viewed at cwh.org.uk/cityvoice.

2. Fire safety

2.1 Sprinklers

The WCC Policy & Scrutiny Committee meeting on 27 September 2018 will be considering recommendations from the Council's Sprinkler Task Group. Key recommendations are:

- Install sprinklers in all properties in tall buildings. The Council should aim for 100% installation of sprinklers in tall buildings, including those owned by leaseholders;
- Carry out section 20 consultation for post-1987 lessees and then undertake the installation of the system to a block, deferring demanding the service charge until completion to seek to maximise cooperation;
- Develop a comprehensive programme of ongoing dialogue and communication with all leaseholders to obtain access to their properties and to document all such individual engagements;
- Installation of 'boxed in' plastic pipework with concealed sprinkler heads;
- Prioritise sheltered housing over tall buildings;
- Ensure comprehensive records of fire safety works on each property are kept, including work and inspections undertaken by others such as the fire brigade;
- Communicate advantages of sprinklers to private freeholders of tall buildings and to maintain a record of all such communications;
- Lobby Government (through LGA and London Councils where appropriate) on funding for the retrofitting of sprinklers, especially in cases where the Housing Revenue Account is having to fund such works;
- Lobby the Government to amend regulations ensure retrofitting sprinklers is easier for social landlords;

- Lobby the Mayor of London so that LFEPA will not unreasonably withhold safety certification whilst works are in progress and if some leaseholders decide (as is currently their right) not to allow access to their properties for works to be done. Also lobby Government for any changes that can be made to regulations to permit the Council to enter (by appointment) such properties to carry out the works.

2.2 Cladding (General)

As per our previous update, recladding work at Warwick and Brindley estate towers, and Glastonbury House, is on hold until the government's cladding review is complete in October 2018. However, in advance of the findings of the Government's cladding review being released, the Council is exploring other solutions including non-cladding options such as rendering. A final decision will be made later in the year.

2.3 Warwick and Brindley estate towers

Residents continue to receive additional support via the dedicated fire safety team on-site and monthly fire safety update newsletters. In addition, an information session for residents is planned for October 2018 in relation to the estate-wide balcony resurfacing and fire door work which will commence this year. Local councillors will be invited to the session.

2.4 Glastonbury House and Glarus Court

Whilst the precautionary cladding replacement work at Glastonbury House is on hold, we are moving forward with the retrofitting of sprinklers to flats and other fire safety improvements. The installation of sprinklers at this 23 storey block containing 162 homes is anticipated to commence early in the New Year and will take around 8 months to complete. A public meeting was recently held with residents and ward members to explain the processes involved. We are also working closely with the scheme manager to ensure residents are supported and up-dated throughout.

Glarus Court is a low rise 4 storey extra care scheme of 20 homes. In line with the sprinkler task group recommendations, this supported housing scheme is also being prioritised for sprinkler installation. Resident consultation will commence later in the year with works likely to commence in the spring

2.5 Infill Panels and Torridon House

CWH manage 65 blocks in varying locations that have infill panels forming part of their façades. Although it is unlikely that these panels will significantly increase the risks from a fire occurring, CWH have completed surveys at each of these buildings and can confirm that all (except Torridon House – see below) do not require any action to mitigate risk.

A planning application has recently been submitted to enable façade replacement work at Torridon House to commence .A decision is expected within 3 months.

2.6 Fire doors

In late August, the MHCLG issued some advice in relation to the testing and classification of composite fire door-sets. The advice note sets out how composite fire door-sets should be tested

and classified. It includes actions for manufacturers, building control bodies, test laboratories and certification bodies. We are working to obtain more information on the testing and any actions that may come out of this.

We are working with our contractors to plan the fire door upgrade and replacement work following the recent communal and flat front door sample inspections. Ward councillors will be notified of block-specific plans, ahead of residents, in the coming weeks. As part of this, many leaseholders may receive notices requiring them to provide fire door-set certification and/or bring their door to the correct safety standard, if we have reason to believe it is not.

2.7 Bathroom window replacement at Ingestre Court

We recently consulted with Ingestre Court residents on two design options, to return ventilation to their bathrooms. This will allow us to remove the over-boarding the existing ventilation whilst maintaining safety.

Following this, 64% of residents said they would prefer the installation of an automatic fire curtain externally over the existing window opening. In line with our Principal Designer's recommendation and the majority of our resident views, WCC has directed CWH to install automatic fire curtains.

Supplies have been ordered and over the next few weeks we will prepare for installation including a survey of each flat. We expect work to be completed in November, subject to resident access.

2.8 Fire risk assessments

The first of our proactive block specific fire safety improvement plans are due out this month. Ward councillors will receive a copy of the plans and supporting communications ahead of residents. All resident queries will be tracked and handled by our team of fire safety experts.

3. Prevention Team

The Prevention Team was set up to bring all homelessness and prevention of homelessness services under one team. The team's aim is to improve and expand Westminster's focus on early intervention and work to increase our links with the community to drive down numbers of people who find themselves homeless.

3.1 Homelessness

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018, The Housing Options Service has continued to transformation the delivery of the statutory service towards a person focused service, adopting a proactive focus on keeping people in their homes or, if this is unaffordable or unsustainable, linking people into alternative housing solutions.

This is being achieved through our specialised teams for singles, families and prevention services in the community. We are working through a programme of workforce development; beginning with comprehensive training for staff focused on a person centred approach and good practice, a roll out of digital and IT solutions that allows staff to work more agilely in the delivery of advice and prevention services through community based locations and co-location with partner services in a variety of locations across the borough.

In the first 3 months of the HRA implementation, compared with April – June 2017/18, we have experienced only a 6% increase in approaches to the service, but aligned with the legislation, we now treat all households who approach in housing need as an applicant, resulting in a significant increase of 150% in homeless applications. Although the number of approaches has seen a very small increase of 6%, the 150% increase in applications reflects both the new way of working following the Act and an increase in numbers of single homeless applicants

The service is responding proactively and with positive results. The Call Centre Team are achieving a 72% first contact resolution of calls, the services has reconfigured the staff profile of the frontline service to meet the increased demand of immediate housing need amongst single adults and they are continually exploring and securing more opportunities to find housing solutions. They have achieved a 27% increase to date in preventing people from becoming homeless in comparison to the same period in 2017/18.

In the late Autumn, we will be opening a new office to launch the new Housing Solutions Service. This is part of the overall strategy to base the service in areas that community based and we will continue to see increases in co-location of housing advisors with partners.

3.2 Commissioning

Westminster Prevention Team were successful in receiving further funding from MHCLG Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding to accompany the RSI award for 18/19. The team have already started implementing interventions to extend our emergency bed provision, increasing our Housing First portfolio and improving our capacity for placements into private rented

accommodation. We continue to work closely with Central Government to support their commitment to half rough sleeping by 2022 and end it entirely by 2027.

The team at Westminster are leading the way in innovation for supported housing projects with an exciting re-tender opportunity across our domestic abuse refuges focusing on improving the way we work with victims of domestic abuse in a psychologically informed, strength-based way. We are also re-designing and re-procuring our whole mental health supported housing pathway to focus on an individual's assets and not their deficits, working closely with health & social care colleagues to ensure people are supported in the right way to ensure they have the best opportunity to live happy, independent lives.

We are also looking at exciting opportunities to partner with businesses in Westminster to deliver essential money management support to young adults across our supported housing and ensure they are equipped with the right skills and opportunities to prosper in Westminster. We hope to ensure that every young person in Westminster has an opportunity to learn how to manage money and stay away from debt.

3.3 Trailblazer

The Trailblazer front line service is up and running across Westminster. We have a presence at a number of sites including Advice Plus, the foodbank and community centres. Referral pathways are set up with Westminster's community champions and multiple voluntary and community organisations across the borough.

From March 2018 to August 2018 the Trailblazer worked with 143 households and completed prevention activities with 114 households. Prevention activities conducted include: supporting

households to reduce rent arrears; challenging evictions; supporting relocation and resettlement; referring into Westminster Employment Services; referring into specialist services; resolving housing benefit problems; linking households in with community and support groups; landlord negotiation.

Our second ethnographic research project (three ward community pilot in Queens Park, Harrow Road and Westbourne) is complete. We mapped these communities, identifying and interviewing over 30 community connectors and highly influential community groups and conducted ethnographies with 15 households. We are using the insightful feedback from the community to drive forward the next phase of work for the Trailblazer.

We are developing a strategy to engage and secure buy in from community groups to enable earlier identification of at-risk households and effective early intervention. This work will aim to support a shift in perceptions and beliefs, increase knowledge of and access to opportunities, build trust, improve communication and feedback to community groups while co-creating tailored approaches in different localities.

Our retrospective research study, exploring mitigating and protective factors in our residents who are at risk of homelessness is underway as is our first qualitative evaluation of the frontline service. The Trailblazer six-month evaluation will be available in October.

4. IT and Digital

The current Westminster City Council Digital programme has been in place since May 2017. The programme has focused on delivery of:

- The “Contact Strategy”, providing an analysis of call and email volumes. A breakdown by Council Service is provided, as well identification of how customer behaviour is driven. This includes the website containing approximately 164 telephone numbers and 200 email addresses.
- Development of multiple business cases to drive transformation, and ultimately savings within Council Services.
- The strategic IT platform for My Account and Report It functionality. The platform was implemented in January 2018. It now has 20 journeys, and 4 integrations to business systems.

With recent Senior Officer changes, it has been agreed that the delivery of digital initiatives will move to the Council’s IT department. Council Services will incorporate digital initiatives into their roadmaps and will take ownership of benefits.

4.1 Report It and My Account

Since the implementation of this initial phase, without any promotion, there has been significant uptake with approximately 4,000 accounts registered, and 10,000 cases created.

The technology behind the functionality, Evolve, is new to market, with Westminster City Council being ‘early-adopters’ and the first customer. Evolve sits on a Microsoft platform, Dynamics 365. The functionality of Evolve is developing, with 6-monthly upgrades delivering

a range of functionality improvements. For example, in the current release, the only way to record a customer address is to use the My Account registration functionality. With the next release, due by the end of September, we will have the ability to capture an address as part of the journey, meaning we can make all forms available to guest users with an option of registration at the end of the journey.

There has been feedback from Councillors and customers that the Report It forms are not as user-friendly as they could be. This was particularly apparent in feedback from Councillors Tim Barnes and Andrew Smith on 26 July 2018. The feedback included that other Councils had implemented better solutions years before WCC had chosen to go with the Evolve platform. The areas of concern were:

- The need to register to use some of the forms
- The performance of the mapping feature
- The look and feel, particularly when accessing via mobile devices.

To address the feedback, we will:

- Implement technical fixes improve overall performance across all devices. We are also seeking approval from Council Services to implement immediate changes to allow Guest account access to all journeys. We aim to complete this by 01 October 2018.
- Using an external agency, undertake detailed user research. We will focus on 4 or 5 key journeys and identify common standards which to apply to all. This will involve engaging 300 to 400 customers via a survey, interviewing 20 to 30 customers, interviewing the WCC contact centre, and Councillors. A schedule and final proposal from the external agency is awaited. However, we aim to commence this in the first week of October 2018.
- Purchase a tool to enable higher-quality testing, across a range of devices using emulation. This will allow us to identify where some devices have issues rendering the forms. We have seen examples where a form works on one type of phone / browser but performs poorly on others. The current mechanisms for receiving feedback do not capture data about the type of browser, phone or tablet used. We will also change the current feedback form on the website to include optional contact details and allow us to interact directly with the customers.

4.2 The Contact Centre platform

The current system Customer Relationship Management system used by the WCC contact centre is provided by Lagan Technologies, at a yearly cost of approximately £135k per annum. A procurement has taken place to identify a partner to implement a solution on the strategic Council Platform, Microsoft Dynamics 365, into the WCC contact centre. This will bring the same customer database across the contact centre and the website and will bring an “omni-channel” experience to our customers. The business case is in development, and subject to a positive case, we will seek Member approval to proceed.

4.3 The Westminster website

The current WCC website was implemented in 2014 and drew on the style and success of the award winning GOV.UK website by using statutory design principles. However, many journeys on the website have been evolved to suit the needs of Council Services rather than users. The experience when carrying out transactions is fragmented. To address the root causes of the issues, beyond the aesthetics, work has commenced to revisit user journeys and interactions.

An external agency, Rainmaker, has been commissioned to review of the website through customer research, and provide a view of what customers hope to achieve when visiting. The first 4 of the 5 ‘lightning sprints’ has covered the following:

- Homepage
- Find It
- Apply & Pay
- What's New in Westminster

The 5th sprint, due to commence 17 September 2018, will focus on a major transaction ‘Life Stage – Moving into Westminster’.

Incorporating the outputs from the customer research, a technical plan for implementation, as well as addressing the underlying technology will be developed. The Council’s Westco design team are producing web branding guidelines prior to implementation of changes.

The underlying technology, the Drupal 7 web platform, was released in 2009. A version 8 was released in 2015, and a version 9 is expected later this year. Following clarity on the customer requirements, we will assess options and begin work to move to a new platform. We will also classify the site into components, with reusable web assets and templates, allowing for automated testing and deployment of sub-sites.

4.4 Restructuring digital delivery

The delivery of digital initiatives will move to the Council's IT department, and Council Services will incorporate digital initiatives into their roadmaps with ownership of benefits. The four roadmaps to be agreed by the end of the calendar year will be:

1. GPH & CMC
2. Adults Social Care & Health
3. Children's Services
4. Corporate Capabilities

IT will have four small programme teams, each responsible for delivery against their roadmap, and digital initiatives will be managed together with major system changes.

The immediate priorities are:

- Delivery
 - Proceed with ENW Phase 1, E-consultation, and Noise SMS (subject to final approval)
 - Launch the project to move Contact Centre to the strategic platform
 - Usability enhancements to My Westminster & Report Its, in line with wider website
- Financial
 - Review business case proposals with Services & Finance
- Organisation
 - Reshape the team to fit within cost envelope for 18/19, with greater proportion of delivery resources
 - Hire the Head of Digital Delivery (Band 5) within IT
 - Build resource profile for 19/20 – focusing on Permanent and Fixed Term

The future phases cover:

- Development of the vision and roadmap per Council Service
 - Facilitating ELT reviews of each service roadmap, identifying commonalities & dependencies
 - Bringing the roadmaps together with wider IT initiatives, into a holistic corporate approach
- Build of future IT capacity and strategy
 - Development skills and platforms
 - Corporate design and architecture standards
 - IT & Digital delivery to become common
- Full website redesign & re-platform

- Channel strategy resolution & implementation in partnership with Policy, Performance, and Communications

