

# Housing, Finance and Customer Services Committee Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Committee date:** 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**Author:** Councillor Andrew Smith

**Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Housing Services

## Priorities for 2019

- Focused on a smooth transition of CityWest Homes (CWH) back to in-house management
- To continually ensure improvements in performance, particularly on repairs and customer services with our housing stock are maintained whilst CityWest Homes is brought back in-house
- Ensure fire safety programmes are implemented to the Council's housing stock
- To Improve and expand on services around homelessness prevention
- To ensure our strategic policy goals reflect our commitment to affordable, safe and attainable housing provision and standards for our residents

## **CWH Transition Programme Update**

### **1. Background**

Following the decision on 15th October to proceed with bringing City West Homes back to the Council's direct control by 1st April 2019, a programme of work has been set up to manage the transition. The aim of the programme is to return the management of housing services to the Council, whilst maintaining service delivery. In order to achieve this, a number of working groups have been set up to address key areas of work required to transfer and integrate CWH staff into the Council.

### **2. Overview of key areas of focus**

**2.1** The termination agreement has been drafted and approved by CWH, with a termination date of 31 March 2019. A Termination Agreement Committee has been set up with full powers of the Board delegated to it to manage the transition and work is underway to develop a governance and scrutiny model from 1st April.

**2.2** A review of processes across CWH's services is underway to inform proposals for new structures and service improvement plans, as required. Joint consultation meetings are taking place with unions on the transfer of staff to WCC by 1st April 2019. Proposals for the integration of staff in corporate services into WCC are being drafted and staff will be consulted on these in the new year.

**2.3** Strategies are being developed to address the technological and cultural requirements for the integration of staff and systems into WCC.

**2.4** A Listening Programme has commenced for residents with the first Open Door event taking place in Pimlico. Twelve other events for resident engagement in January/February have been scheduled with the purpose of consulting on how the service can improve going forward.

## **CityWest Homes**

### **3. Resident Services**

#### **3.1 City West Connect**

After a challenging few months the investment made in this team is starting to deliver an improved service in almost all parts of the service including the speed of call answering, responding to emails and stage 1 complaints.

The training program has now been completed which means that we now have a higher number of call handlers available to take calls. In addition, Agilysis are in place, until March 2019, to manage the calls relating to new repair issues.

This double prong approach has led to a dramatic fall in the average waiting time from 7 minutes in September to 2 minutes in November and less than a minute at the start of December. This is by far the best performance so far this year. Another success is the number of calls now answered within 30 seconds. This has gone from 22% in September to 58% in November and 76% at the start of December.

	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec (so far)</b>
Calls offered	19210	22986	23555	9650
Calls % answered	74%	68%	87%	94%
Average wait time	7:19	6:29	2:35	1:00
% calls answered in 30 seconds	22%	13%	58%	74%
% calls abandoned	26%	25%	13%	6%

It should be noted that as of November there is now a survey which asks callers about their experience with the call they made. Early results have been very positive with overall satisfaction levels of 82% in the first 6 weeks. This is however based on a small sample. Of the 518 residents invited to take part just over half of them actually did.

Email traffic continues at steady rate of c.200 per day. During November 3,881 emails were received and 100% of them responded to within 2 days as set out in the SLA. Currently there are around 300 awaiting attention. This is a significant change from the c.1000 emails a few months ago.

### **3.2 Parking - Use of Traffic Management Orders (TMO)**

A proposal to provide a payment 'holiday' to parking permit holders on the Churchill Gardens Estate, prior to moving to the new enforcement arrangements, has been agreed and the residents notified. This will stay in place until the TMOs are implemented by WCCs Parking Team.

At the moment, a very small number of claims have been made for compensation from individuals in other areas, but a distinction can be drawn between Churchill Gardens and other locations for the following reasons:

Churchill Gardens is one of only two estates where parking is by permit only, and there are no allocated spaces. This makes it susceptible to unauthorised parking, as drivers do not need to be concerned about parking in another person's space. (27 spaces at Queens Park Court are also structured this way but there are no reports of problems in this location)

In addition, Churchill Gardens is openly accessible to third parties as there are no barrier gates which make it even more susceptible to unauthorised parking.

WCC's Parking Team are currently reviewing the project to implement TMOs (subject to statutory consultation) which will include a new revised timeline. The project remains a priority but the Cabinet Member has been advised that this is now unlikely to be before March 2019.

### **3.3 Estate Services**

The team's main function is to ensure that our estates are clean, safe, free from graffiti and generally well maintained. These officers play a major role in keeping communal areas clear of anything that may be combustible or a trip hazard. The policy and process for this issue is being developed with a role out programmed to start in April 2019.

CityWest Homes provides estate services (cleaning, grounds maintenance and concierge services) through three contracts which have been extended to 31 March 2019. Tenders have now been evaluated and recommended awards have been identified. The new contract prices vary from area

to area with increases and reductions against current costs, but the overall contract sums fall within current budgetary provision. The majority of costs are recoverable from leaseholders and tenants through service charges. The new contracts will be let in the name of the Council, rather than CityWest Homes (as they currently are).

Section 20 'Notices of Proposal' are scheduled to be issued to all leaseholders on 4 January 2019 with a closing date of 8 February 2019. These will set out the recommended awards for each service and will invite observations during this period. Leaseholders will be able to inspect the contract documentation in each of the four area offices. Details will also be published on the website and tenants will also be able to inspect the documentation. Although the new contracts include the absorption of the in-house gardening team at Lillington and Longmoore Gardens, this is currently being reviewed following a petition received from residents.

### **3.4 Income Recovery**

The Income team continue to perform well even with the increasing number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants. The current performance stands at 98.46% which is an improvement on this time last year. However, the team is conscious that due to the holiday period performance may have dipped as tenants may have diverted their funds to pay for presents and events during the holiday period.

As a result the team held an away day to develop an action plan. This plan includes such initiatives as engaging with tenants with low arrear balances and increasing the number of visits by working some evenings and weekends.

As mentioned above, UC is having a negative impact on performance. There are now in excess of 400 households in receipt of UC. Of these, almost 75% are in arrears with a total arrears balance of c. £200k. In an effort to tackle this growing issue, additional staff have been employed to perform outreach work. This team will work closely with these residents and where need deal with the application of Alternative Payment Arrangements.

### **3.5 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

The performance of the team (74% satisfaction against a target of 83%) is not where we would like it to be. The team have been impacted by a high level of vacancies and the long term absence of the head of the department. A recruitment program is underway but the team will not be fully staffed until mid-way through January.

In advance of the start date for the new recruits an action plan has been developed which includes increased face to face contact with those suffering from ASB and a redrafting of the ASB action plan.

### **3.6 Resident engagement**

The main issue for this team is the delivery of the five Open Door events. The first two events have successfully taken place with a further three planned for early next year. In total, in excess of 250 residents attended and were able to access services, complete the WCC survey and raise any issues they had.

Other issues include the cost of running the community halls and managing the Tenant Management Organisations.

A proposal to increase the charges for using the community halls has been presented to the Cabinet Minister for Housing. At the current rates it is not financially viable to maintain the halls to a fit standard.

Westminster City Council (WCC) currently has eight TMOs who manage 1,446 properties.

Seven of the TMOs have had performance audits carried out by the bi-borough audit team. After the audits were undertaken, an action plan for each TMO was put together with a variety of high, medium and low recommendations for improvement.

All the TMOs have actions still outstanding and for some the actions have been outstanding however most are attempting to tackle the long outstanding ones.

WCC has recently issued a Warning Notice to Torridon Residents Co-op as its outstanding actions were seriously overdue. Since the receipt of the warning the TMO have greatly reduced the number of outstanding actions.

### **3.7 Complaints**

48 complaints were received during November with 45 closed during the month. Of these most of them, 28 (58%) were due to repairs with the rest a mixture of customer care and housing management issues. The longest outstanding complaint goes back to the middle of November. We currently have 34 complaints outstanding.

### **3.8 Tenancy Reviews**

We are now up to 238 tenancy reviews at which we either review or put in place the support a resident may need. This is especially important during the winter months and this issue is currently being highlighted on the web site.

In addition, the housing teams are reviewing our approach to illegal subletting. Contact has been made with other social landlords to ascertain good practice and their use of 3<sup>rd</sup> party data providers. In particular there is development underway of a piece of software that will help to identify properties that are let on sites such as Airbnb. To date there have been 9 properties recovered and costs of £20k recovered from one case that went to court.

The training for flexible tenancy reviews has now been completed so that staff can start the reviews in January. There are 9 tenancies up for review in January.

## **4.Repairs**

Following the last report to Policy & Scrutiny Committee in November, the repairs service is making encouraging progress as we implement the Repairs Improvement Plan across the directorate. This together with the improvements being made within the Call Centre and joint working with Housing and Estate management are all feeding into a much improved repairs service.

#### **4.1 Planned Preventative Maintenance**

One of the main reasons contributing to the high volume of repairs being raised, was the lack of a planned preventative maintenance programme being in place, which addresses, leaks, water ingress etc.

This has been addressed and a planned preventative maintenance (PPM) programme of works has commenced and is being rolled out across the borough. The programme involves inspecting, rodding and clearing drains, gutters and downpipes. A detailed analysis was completed of the repairs being raised across the borough, relating to water ingress, roof leaks, blocked drains etc.

These 'heat maps' identified those areas we need to concentrate on in the first instance.

The initial estates identified where PPM's have commenced are and programmed to be completed by February 2019.

These programmed works involve inspecting and clearing out all debris from stacks and waste pipes. Specialist CCTV / camera surveys are being completed which identify any fractured/broken stacks or failures in the drainage system. This will then form part of our 2019/20 capital asset strategy investment plan to carry out the replacement or major repairs to the drainage system which will turn off or reduce repair demand for these types of repairs across the City of Westminster.

As a result of the PPMs (particularly on Churchill Gardens) CWH have only recorded 2 call outs for leaks potentially associated with a roof over the last two months, which is a positive indication that the clearances are progressing well and resulting in reduced blockages.

#### **4.2 Operational Management**

The operational areas of the contract are monitored via 4 area operational management meetings who meet on a weekly basis. These are chaired by the relevant Area Property Manager.

The agenda will include the KPI's and Work in Progress (WIP) relating to area performance at a local level.

In addition, Morgan Sindall's surveyors have been decentralised and relocated to work alongside CWH staff area repairs teams.

Each area team member has been allocated a village (or multiple estates) to maintain and carry out all pre / post and block inspections. This allows direct accountability and responsibility for repair issues on blocks and provides continuity of delivery across all Term contracts.

The full benefit of this change will be seen in February / March 2019 as the changes are embedded, however, already, there are indications of reduced follow on jobs and complaints in November and into December 2018.

The area team managers focus on the following at the weekly operation meetings,

- Orchard and service delivery issues
- Live delivery review of Emergencies and Urgent repairs
- Work in progress

- Service provider’s resource reviews and sub-contractor reviews
- Weekly commercial meetings
- Customer satisfaction reviews

### 4.3 Annual Contract Review

The annual review of the contract is currently being concluded, with both parties agreeing to several contractual changes and amendments which will put measures in place to improve contract delivery, financial management and more focus on customer satisfaction.

Some of the improvements to the management of the contract include:

- The core group membership, terms of reference and agenda have been amended to reflect the strategic priorities of the contract, i.e. to achieve acceptable performance standards in line with KPIs and to oversee far tighter spending controls
- Management Information being reviewed weekly and focused review on works in progress
- Post inspections and % of service delivered against KPI’s
- Financial forecasts produced every month with quarterly actuals signed off against budgets and providing spend profiles against Revenue and Capital.
- Customer satisfaction reviews
- Improved financial regulations are in place for payments including weekly commercial meetings and quarterly final account reviews.

### 4.4 KPIs for November 2018

Service delivery for November 2018 has confirmed the highest achievement and delivery levels across both the Repairs and M&E contracts since the contract commenced in August 2017.

The KPI’s below illustrate the steady level of improved performance beginning to come through the service, as we start to embed the Repairs Improvement Plan and other changes including, the area delivery model and operational management of the contract, introduction of the PPM’s, impact of co-location of Morgan Sindall and CWH Surveyors, Morgan Sindall’s structural change and data reviews and training of the Call Centre staff.

Property Services KPIs	Target	Nov
Repairs first time fixes	85%	87%
Overall satisfaction with repairs service	90%	83%
Satisfaction with quality of repair	88%	85%
% of repairs completed within timescale [Immediate]	1 day	95%
% of repairs completed within timescale [Appointed]	20 working days	85%

In addition, the total number of repairs orders currently with Morgan Sindall is under 2,500 and the total number of repairs outside of SLA is 176 representing 6%. (Morgan Sindall receives an estimated 4,000 repairs per month).

#### **4.5 Statutory Services November 2018**

Statutory Services and Compliance is an area of the business that continues to sustain and improve month on month with 100% recorded and verified across gas, water and electrics in November with an increase of in dwelling electrical testing within the month.

#### **4.6 Strategic Options Appraisal – Supported Living**

Morgan Sindall and City West Homes in conjunction with Westminster Adult Services, are reviewing tailoring a repairs services directly for the Sheltered schemes that will encompass a direct and dedicate repairs service into Morgan Sindall for all M&E and repairs across the city so as to improve the experience of our scheme managers and our residents that live in the supported housing blocks.

The focus of the delivery will focus on

The health and wellbeing of residents, including statutory requirements.

Ensure that all properties meet all minimum requirements for the occupants with full in dwelling surveys for the sheltered homes commencing in January 2019:

- Environmental efficiency to make the buildings easier to heat for residents, and to reduce energy costs and emissions.
- Involve residents in meaningful liaison with a dedicated RLO and weekly scheme manager meetings, targeting realistic agreements on service delivery based upon available resources and scheme manager aspirations.
- Ensure that all CWH and WCC properties are managed in an efficient, effective and affordable manner with the support of the Scheme managers
- To create and maintain long term investment programmes based on comprehensive stock condition data.

The objective of the new repairs function based on initial discussions in relation to the servicing of CWH's 23 Supported Living Schemes (circa 1,200 units) will be focused on opportunities to enhance the customer experience through the development and delivery of a bespoke model.

Our proposals also include for the delivery of discretionary decoration and regular planned preventative maintenance works to Supported Living Schemes.

CWH and Morgan Sindall propose to hold 'Meet the Contractor' events at all 23 Supported Living Schemes in order to introduce our team and proposals to residents in January 2019.



## **5. Fire Safety**

### **5.1 Fire doors**

In March 2018 the council organised proactive and independent inspections of fire doors in blocks of six storeys and above, which has now been completed. While doors were fully compliant at the time of installation, many have deteriorated over time. As a result, more than 10,000 doors need to be replaced or upgraded because they no longer meet current building regulation standards (FD30 self-closing fire door). Some doors need minor upgrades to comply with standards and others need to be fully replaced. A programme of remedial works is being developed and residents will be kept fully advised of progress. Residents remain safe in their homes as up to date fire risk assessments are in place and work is being prioritised.

As a result of this work so far, doors across Warwick and Brindley estate towers have been identified as requiring action first and work is expected to start in spring 2019.

All other buildings will be addressed as required and in most cases, in conjunction with planned major works.

Leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that their own fire doorsets are to standard. We will be writing to them individually to ensure we have confirmation that doors meet current performance requirements.

We can offer leaseholders the opportunity to opt-in, via written agreement, to have their fire doorset replaced by the same manufacturer, in buildings where we are also replacing tenanted doors as part of planned major works.

In cases where we cannot offer opt-in, we will suggest leaseholders contact the manufacturer directly, or make their own arrangement as long as the doorset is compliant.

### **5.2 Cladding (General)**

There is no significant update on cladding systems since the last update and following the governments review.

We are now considering alternative cladding solutions, including non-panel based systems such as insulated render systems, as alternatives.

A final decision will be made on the future systems, once outstanding test reports are received and residents are consulted.

### **5.3 Warwick and Brindley estate towers**

Residents and councillors were invited to a progress meeting 6 December 2018. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information on planned balcony resurfacing and fire doorset replacement work, how it may affect residents and approximate timescales. These two large scale projects have taken longer than expected to coordinate, as there has been a change in contractors, from Wates to Axis, and the proposed cladding design. At this stage, balcony work is due to start in January and the

doorset replacement and the insulation work is now anticipated to start in spring 2019, subject to the outcome of resident consultation.

#### **5.4 Torridon House**

Planning permission has now be received. Work is expected to start on site at the end of February 2019.

#### **5.5 Glastonbury House and Glarus Court**

The precautionary cladding replacement work at Glastonbury House remains on hold for whilst alternative insulation options are considered. In the meantime, we are moving forward with the other important fire safety work, including the retrofit of sprinklers to flats and the provision of mobility scooter storage facilities. This work remains on track for completion by December 2019.

In addition, Glarus Court (low rise, extra care scheme) will also have sprinklers retrofitted to its 20 flats, within the next 12 months. Works are likely to start in the spring following resident consultation and complete by the end of 2019.

#### **5.6 Fire Safety Improvement Plans**

The Fire Safety Improvement Plan (FSIP) pilot continues with 17 of the 24 pilot high-rise blocks FSIP packs posted and emailed to date.

Once we complete this pilot in December, we will evaluate and review feedback from residents and councillors on the content of the plans; the amount of detail and format of the plan and supporting documents, before FSIPs become part of our business as usual operations.

#### **5.7 Sprinklers**

The response to Policy and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on sprinklers is dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

### **6. Homelessness Prevention**

**6.1** The new Housing Solutions Service (formerly Housing Options) on Bruckner St was successfully launched in November with guests from across the Prevention and Homelessness Partnership. The new office is designed to be a psychologically environment which is more welcoming to residents and partners. We have numerous services embedded in the building; these include prevention services, debt and benefit advice, landlord negotiation, employment support, legal advice, repairs enforcement, family mediation, access to floating support and Trailblazer programmes and on the day emergency homeless services.

## **7. Housing and Policy**

### **7.1 Implementing flexible tenancies**

In line with the Tenancy Policy, the council has been offering flexible or fixed term tenancies for new tenants since 2013 and the first of these tenancies will expire in summer 2019, meaning that the process of reviewing them will start in January 2019 (eight months beforehand). The review will decide if a further tenancy should be offered at the same or another address and if the tenant and their household needs any additional support. The aim of flexible tenancies is to make better use of the housing stock for those in need, as household circumstances can change over time. Households that are under occupying are likely to be offered smaller homes. Only in limited circumstances will no further tenancy at all be offered at any address and circumstances include where there have been serious or persistent breaches of the tenancy agreement, or where the tenant has not participated in the review and it is reasonable for them to do so. The associate processes have been developed to help ensure flexible tenants are not worried about the process and the message is being communicated that in most cases tenancies will be renewed.

### **7.2 Policy for tenants in housing renewal areas**

The council is consulting on this updated Policy until 8th February 2019. It sets out the rehousing rights and options, financial compensation and general support for council tenants where the council wants to acquire their homes to enable housing renewal to go ahead. There are a range of options for council tenants, including a right to remain or return to the housing renewal area in one of the new homes. The Policy proposes that those needing to move due to regeneration have the highest priority in the Allocations Scheme, as currently those under occupying have the highest priority. The Policy also sets out the help and support for other tenants in housing renewal areas, i.e. homeless households in Temporary Accommodation and private rented tenants. Letters have been sent to affected tenants about the consultation, drop in sessions to explain it further are planned for the new year and it is also being discussed with the CityWest Homes Residents' Council.

### **7.3 Homelessness Strategy**

In line with requirements in the Homelessness Reduction Act, a new strategy, with a focus on preventing homelessness, is being developed and will be consulted on in the new year.