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Author: Councillor Andrew Smith

Portfolio: Cabinet Member for Housing Services

Priorities for 2019

- Develop and improve engagement between Westminster City Council and our housing residents.
- To continually ensure improvements in performance, particularly on repairs and customer services with our housing stock is maintained.
- Ensure the new robust and stringent parking enforcement system is implemented across the Westminster City Council housing estates as a priority.
- 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.

1. Westminster Housing Services

1.1 Resident Services

Contact Centre

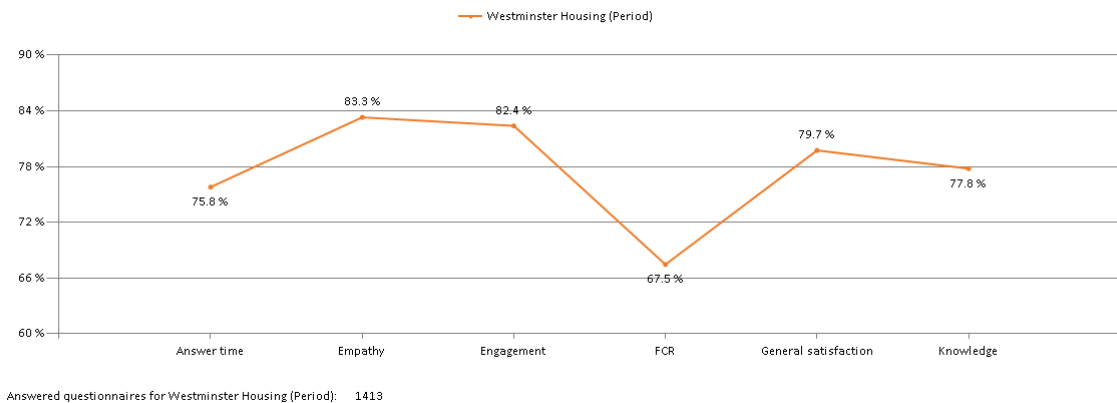
The steady improvement in call handling performance achieved in Q3 continued into Q4 and the highest levels of performance to date were recorded. Customer contact volumes declined over the same period with a total of 56,230 calls offered in Q4, a reduction of 6,854 compared to Q3.

The seasonal nature of repairs demand has had an impact on call volumes but the reduction in volumes can also be attributed to improvements delivered in both the Contact Centre and Repairs teams.

84% of calls were answered within 30 seconds – above the target of 70%, and 96% of all calls offered were answered. Average waiting time was 30 seconds.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	April-June	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March
Calls Offered	58,988	59,751	63,084	56,230
Calls Answered	55,313	50,543	51,692	54,098
Answered %	94%	85%	82%	96%
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SLA (70/30)	68.00%	47.90%	50.10%	84%

A total of 1,413 Customer Satisfaction Surveys were completed on contact centre performance and satisfaction and engagement levels remained very positive. Every negative comment is tracked and acted on to drive further improvements in satisfaction and to resolve any on-going customer concerns.



A total of 13,544 customer enquiries were received via email with 99% of these responded to within 48 hours.

Whilst there has been a sustained improvement in performance across the Contact Centre team, the focus now is on improving the quality of customer interactions. A new quality framework has been implemented and the Team Managers' focus in Q1 will be driving the quality of calls and further improving Customer Satisfaction. This will be complemented by a Speech Analytics project that will help us to identify further opportunities for improving the Customer experience when engaging with our teams across channels.

Complaints performance also improved in Q4 with 193 complaints logged and 98% responded to within target.

The highest volume service is repairs and 69% of all complaints were in relation to that service.

As part of the integration of housing services back into the council, the housing complaints team has adopted iCasework, the council's complaints management database. This went live in April and early results are very positive.

As part of improving the service to our residents, we have also developed and rolled out a new customer engagement channel via Twitter (@WCC Housing) to handle any queries our residents may have about their home – e.g. repair issues. Early anecdotal feedback suggests this has proved useful for residents with an overall positive response.

1.2 Anti-Social Behaviour Services (ASB)

Satisfaction with case handling satisfaction was recorded as 74% for 2018/19 against a target of 83%. In March the team achieved 93% case handling satisfaction, with 14 out of 15 survey responses being satisfied.

The top three issues making up the ASB caseload at the end of the year were:

1. Noise – 65 cases
2. Drug dealing/misuse – 32 cases
3. Verbal abuse/harassment – 31 cases

Noise nuisance complaints make up over a third of ASB cases and can be time consuming to resolve. They are often caused by differences in lifestyle which can be resolved by residents without the need for ASB services. The ASB team have worked hard to reduce the number of noise cases which require intervention and where appropriate, residents have been encouraged to communicate with their neighbours when noise becomes an issue. An external mediation service is also available to help residents to resolve difficult situations to the satisfaction of both parties.

The team have increased their visibility on estates through ongoing work which has included attending "Westminster on Wheels" and through conducting multi-agency initiatives such as joint door knocks, walkabouts and weapon sweeps. This has helped residents to report ASB and gain access to specialist services.

For residents who prefer to report ASB electronically, the online reporting form has been made more user friendly and is being tested prior to launch in June.

1.3 Rent collection

At the end of March 2019, current tenancy rent arrears stood at £1,040,622 which represents just 1.28% of the debit.

This performance is achieved through helping tenants to sustain their tenancies and just 11 evictions were carried out in 2018/19 due to rent arrears. The income management team works in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to ensure tenants have access to money management advice, debt counselling and help with claiming benefits.

At the end of March 2019, 688 tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit (UC), an increase from 605 cases at the end of February 2019. The arrears for UC cases at the end of March 2019 totalled £341,190.74 with 59.74% of UC cases in arrears.

A total of £229,485 was collected in former tenant income against a target of £150,000, exceeding the target set by £79,485.

1.4 Estate Services

The compliance team were out and about on estates completing 780 site visits in April 2019 and achieving 100% completion of block/estate inspections due. The standard of cleaning was scored at 97.20% and 96.25% for grounds maintenance.

A programme of works to ensure playgrounds managed by the housing service across the borough are safe and in good condition is progressing well.

A programme of works has also started on the welfare facilities across the borough for estate services contractors to ensure the conditions are fit for purpose.

1.5 Local Offer

The project to pilot a 'local offer' on the Brunel Estate has now moved into business as usual phase and we are updating residents on all the issues that were raised that made it into the offer. This will take place during June. The local offer is a framework of targets and priorities agreed with residents locally. Performance against the framework is then monitored and reported to the local neighbourhood.

The process has been adapted in response to residents' feedback to focus better on their priorities. This includes establishing an ASB specific action plan for the Brunel estate.

Members will be invited to a closing presentation on the Local Offer in June on how it worked in practice, and the plans for rolling the framework out across the rest of the estates this year.

The Brunel local offer will continue with a set of agreed targets and priorities, and a monthly monitoring regime in place. An update to all residents of the estate will be provided shortly. Longer term we will be looking at the resources needed to address the priorities identified on estates.

1.6 Tenancy Reviews

The purpose of the reviews is to ensure residents receive the support they need to sustain their tenancies as well as to identify potential cases of tenancy fraud. 500 tenancy reviews were completed in 2018/19, of which 32 were statutory, flexible tenancy reviews.

This year the housing management teams will continue to work with vulnerable tenants through a range of projects. A sample of tenants who are not in regular contact with housing services will also be contacted to ensure they receive the support they need and also to identify any cases where non-engagement might be an indication of something less positive, such as tenancy fraud or other wrongdoing.

1.7 Parking

Work to implement Traffic Management Orders remains on track, with Phase 1a at Churchill Gardens now in force. Road markings and signage are currently being snagged, and patrols are enforcing throughout controlled hours.

As part of the standard roll-out process, warning notices (PCNs without a fine attached) are being issued, targeted primarily at vehicles not displaying any permit at all, or parking on double yellow lines.

Letters were sent to residents and an up-to-date FAQs is on the Westminster Housing website. Full PCN issue (with fines) started on Tuesday 21 May.

At the time of writing, statutory consultation is also in progress for Phase 1B (Brunel, Wessex and Little Venice estates) with a closing date of 28 May 2019. Drop-in sessions were held at the West Area Service Centre for a week from the 20 – 24 May 2019.

Statutory consultation for the next Phase 2, including Church Street and St Johns Wood is currently scheduled for the end of May/beginning of June, subject to the volume of representations received for Phase 1B, which may require additional resources to complete.

The current estimated completion date for the project, with enforcement in place through the TMO is September 2019.

1.8 Resident Engagement

Work is underway to reinvigorate resident engagement ensuring we increase the diversity of resident voices to reflect the makeup of our residents. We will do this by improving communication with and between the Resident Associations, Resident Council and Area Forums as well as launching an online group where residents can comment and feedback. Following positive feedback, we will undertake a listening programme annually and will organise Meet the Cabinet member sessions for residents to ask questions.

A programme of work to improve the quality of community spaces has made great progress. The Lydford estate has two community halls including the underused Portgate Hall which has been transformed into a construction training centre for Westminster residents. Linked to apprenticeships and jobs with housing contractors, the new centre is already assisting residents to gain experience

with gaining employment. This year 23 pre-apprenticeships and 20 apprenticeships were provided through social value commitments in construction contracts.

St Jude's Hall in Queens Park is also undergoing renovation. The works will ensure that the hall continues to be a vital community resource for local Westminster residents. This follows renovation work to Queens Park Court hall which was done as part of a housing contractors' commitment to social value.

Work continues with residents' groups across the city. Achievements include the launch of Vale Royal Residents Association; a new gardening group at Townsend estate and work towards new residents' groups on Grosvenor and Regency estate and for west street properties.

Residents at Charfield Court have entered into a Local Management Agreement for cleaning and grounds maintenance. This means that they will manage these parts of the housing service themselves.

Service improvement plans have been issued to four Tenant Management Organisations that have failed to complete audit recommendations in time. Two further plans will be issued in May. Ward members have been briefed.

2.Fire Safety

2.1 Fire doors

All inspections have been completed and a programme of remedial has been being developed and members and residents will be kept fully advised of progress. Around 10,000 doors need to be replaced or upgraded in blocks six- storey and above. Around 47% need to be upgraded (a combination of door closers, strips, seals and letters boxes) and the remaining 53% replaced. Residents remain safe in their homes as up-to-date fire risk assessments are in place and work is being prioritised. An overarching communication strategy has been drafted and covers how residents will be kept informed including updating the website and the options available to leaseholders.

As a result of the prioritisation 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 over the next three years with the highest risk blocks completed in the first 12 months (April 2019 – March 2020). The inspection programme for lower rise buildings (five storey and below) will commence once the three-year programme has been delivered.

Leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that their own fire doorsets are to standard. We have been 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.

2.2 Warwick and Brindley estate towers

Following extension consultation, the decision has been taken to change from external cladding panels to external wall insulation. Work is expected to start in the spring and complete by December 2019. Balcony work started in January and the doorset replacement programme is expected to start in late spring.

2.3 Glastonbury House and Glarus Court

The precautionary cladding replacement work at Glastonbury House remains on hold 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 (pilot installations have been completed) has been 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.

2.4 Sprinklers

It is recommended that any lessons learnt from the two installations mentioned above are incorporated into the wider roll-out across council stock. It is proposed to prioritise the remaining sheltered housing (community housing schemes) ahead of the tall buildings. The full cost of installation to the remaining sheltered and tall buildings is £28m. This is made up of £6m to complete the sheltered housing schemes and £20m for tall buildings. Funding will need to be considered and agreed as part of the HRA business plan from the 2020/2021 financial year. The £2m for Glastonbury House and Glarus Court sprinklers is already included in the business plan for 2019/2020.

Leaseholders in tall buildings will be surveyed to establish their views on the sprinkler roll-out and to understand whether the costs of installations will be an inhibitor. A communication and implementation plan has been drafted and the survey will commence in late spring. The results will feed into the lessons learned from the Glastonbury House and Glarus Court installations.

2.5 Fire Safety Improvement Plans

As part of our ongoing building safety communication plan project to increase building safety

awareness, we ran a pilot from October - December 2018, providing residents with a copy of their buildings Fire Safety Improvement Plan (FSIP), which outlines the findings from their most recent fire risk assessment (FRA) and our plans to address the findings and to improve building safety.

Residents were involved in the design of the strategy, plan template and supporting communications, via a themed service review group in August 2018.

The pilot plans were built from fire risk assessments and sent with a cover letter and fact sheet, via post to residents in 3,738 flats, and via email to 1701, across 41 high rise residential buildings.

Overall the feedback from residents was positive and constructive:

- 67% of residents said they now feel extremely or well informed, compared to 49% before receiving their FSIP. Likewise, the number of people who feel that they were poorly informed reduced by 50% after receiving their FSIP.
- 56% feel safer after receiving their FSIP.
- 70% agree that the FSIP is helpful however they want to know when actions will be completed, what is happening with sprinklers, see results from other inspections (i.e. monthly housekeeping) and receive more information about what they should do in the event of a fire.
- 60% would access their FSIP if it was available online.

Proposals for the wider roll-out across council stock will be in place by summer 2019.

3.Homelessness prevention

3.1 Housing Solutions Service

Our frontline statutory homelessness services provided by the Housing Solutions Partnership of Places for People, their subsidiary RMG Ltd, Shelter & Passage have successfully delivered the first year of statutory services since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018. The first year of the Act has seen increased demand on the service so to ensure that they continue to transform, develop and meet the expectations of our residents, the Partnership has a put in place a three-year strategic service delivery programme with a wide range of commitments.

These include:

- securing accreditation for the service through recognised bodies such as Customer Service Excellence, Investors in People, and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation;
- improving customer experience through a range of activities including mystery shopping, co designing the service standards, quality checks and customer experience groups; and
- a focus on workforce development, ensuring that partnership develops and grows into a mature delivery model with experienced resilient staff through continued training, benchmarking and good practice with partners and other local authorities and giving staff the opportunity to shape the service through regular engagement and staff sounding boards.

3.2 Commissioning

Following from the last P&S Report dated 18 March 2019, we can now confirm a successful contract start for both our Domestic Abuse Services and our ambitious Mental Health Support Housing re-procurement, the new contracts began on 1 April and 1 May respectively.

The Commissioning Team have been working to develop a clear and coherent plan to ensure that all our contracts are working as effectively and efficiently as possible. We will be producing a timetable of re-procurement over the Summer and will look to launch at an event with stakeholders and partners. During the event we will showcase our work to date, outline our upcoming workplan and explore new ways of working and new opportunities for supported housing commissioning.

Over the past quarter Westminster City Council have released several market leading toolkits and reports including the Autism Toolkit, Victimisation Report and online training for the sector to improve their understanding of psychologically informed environments. The Autism Toolkit outlines the prevalence of Autism in the homeless population and gives ideas and advice on how to better support people in that situation. The work has received national media coverage and continues to shine a light on an important subject.

3.3 Trailblazer

Since the start of the project, we have worked with 229 households to prevent those that are risk of homelessness in the private rented sector. We continue to target those who have Assured Shorthold Tenancy to manage their existing tenancies and instances where it is not practical due to affordability or living conditions support households to explore their options.

The specialist caseworkers explore cases as a team, sharing best practices and supporting one another to maximise the outcomes for service users. The team provide advice and information to all that access the service, even if it is to signpost to the most suited service for an individual's needs. Support with welfare and benefits continues to be a major factor that has an impact on our service user's ability to maintain their tenancies, and staff have supported the recovery of more than £150,000 in entitled benefits.

We are still committed to upskilling our local community groups and connectors and have a graduate who has joined the team to support the development of training materials for residents and partnership agencies. Recognising the value in developing new skills and employment the Trailblazer project will be working with HELP project to strengthen the offer for our residents in the private rented sector help to maximise their incomes.

4. Local housing policies

4.1 Local Lettings Plan for the Tollgate Gardens Estate

In March/April 2019 the council consulted on a Local Lettings Plan proposing how the new additional social and intermediate homes, developed through the regeneration programme, would be let. A leaflet setting out the proposals and how to respond was sent to local residents and their feedback was also taken at a drop-in session. The final Plan will be published in early summer.

4.2 Tenants Policy for Tenants in Housing Renewal Areas

The Council consulted on this updated policy until 8 February 2019 and held a further drop-in session for Church Street tenants to give their feedback in April. The proposed policy 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. The updated policy will be published in early summer.

4.3 Homelessness Strategy

A new homelessness strategy is being drafted and it will be consulted on in the summer.