



Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Westminster Housing Services

Customer Services - Contact Centre

The seasonal nature of repairs demand has had an impact on call volumes with winter volumes now being delivered. The winter recruitment plan is now complete, and resources are in place to manage the additional volumes. Training has been delivered on service quality best practice and a coaching plan has been implemented with key milestones for embedding a coaching culture.

From April to October 79% of calls were answered within 30 seconds – above the target of 70%. 94% of all calls were answered, with an average waiting time of 42 seconds.

A total of 3,309 Customer Satisfaction Surveys were completed and overall 83.5% of residents were satisfied. 71.4% of residents believed their query to be resolved and both engagement and empathy levels were tracking above 85%, with each satisfaction metric improving compared to the previous six months. 28,965 emails have been received year to date in the Housing Contact Centre, and the introduction of Twitter continues to be a popular channel for residents, with 95 enquires received in October with a total of 646 enquiries received since April. 100% of all enquiries have been responded to within four hours.

Approval has been given to explore the replacement contact centre solution for Housing. The project will focus on the four pillars of great customer service: Getting Connected, Interaction Management, Resource Management and Knowledge & Insight. Priority will be given to bring all customer contact channels into a single customer view.

Repairs

Since taking over the service on 1 April 2019, we have taken immediate action to resolve some of the key problems, although we know there is much more to do in the months ahead. We have worked with our contractor Morgan Sindall to dramatically improve our repairs service:

- 99% of all emergency repairs were completed on time during September 2019.
- Appointments made and kept for routine repairs stands at 96% for September. First time fix was 84%.
- 96% of all routine repair appointments made and kept for routine repairs stands at 96%.

Our statutory compliance figures for gas, electricity and water testing remains strong. For September, the KPI's were:

- Gas in-flat compliance – 99.82%
- Gas communal boiler compliance – 100%
- Water Tank testing 98% - (now 100%)
- Electrical in-flat testing – 100%

We have now completed over 300 blocks (9,321 dwellings and 45% of the stock). Phase 2 is now commencing which will revisit some of the previous cleaned blocks. This will provide useful information in determining the frequency of the programme for each block. Particular attention is given to hotspots such as flats above shops (grease/fat etc.) areas with high density of trees (leaves etc).

The frequency of the visits will be approximately:

- 100mm diameter downpipe = 24 monthly visit
- 75mm = 12 monthly visit

A comparison of drainage repairs requested over the last two financial years show that generally there has been a reduction of 40% on drainage requests, reducing from 933 to 560 across the borough with 337 fewer calls for leaks.

Estimates and bills for leaseholders

From the 1st April 2020 leaseholders will receive an **annual** service charge demand for their day to day maintenance and management service charge (commonly known as the day to day service charges). For those leaseholders who have also received a statutory section 20 consultation for major works prior to January 2020 they will also receive an estimated major works service charge demand.

Both estimated service charges will be issued in March 2020 before the commencement of the year (1 April 2020) and will provide a full breakdown of the estimated service charges. The day to day service charges will be predicated on the past three years actuals service charges, as well as any proposed changes to the estimated services directly from the heads of service who are the budget holders.

The major works service charges will be based on fully costed service charges, which reflect the block validation survey's and not a simply a budget estimate of the proposed works. Both estimated charges will provide our leaseholders with a far greater degree of accuracy available for *estimated* service charges.

The proposal to invoice our leaseholders once annually a year will remove the requirement for a second duplicate service charge demand in October of each year. This in addition to the increased accuracy of the service charges will help and assist our leaseholders to budget for the full year ahead. For leaseholders who are taking up the extended payment options for their major works service charges, they will only be required to undertake this process once and not twice, which is the current process

Early communications on the proposed changes were conveyed to our leaseholders in the September 2019 lessee newsletter.

The second half yearly estimated service charges were issued on 25 September 2019 and included the half yearly estimated service charge for the period 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020.

The mailing also included the actual day to day service charge account adjustments for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. The estimated service charge for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 was in the sum of £13,271,947.04. The Actual service charge for the same period was £13,542,255.72. The net difference resulted in a debit adjustment in the sum of £270,308.68.

The mailing was accompanied with a Lessee newsletter and a new ‘Your October 2019 Service Charge bill explained’ leaflet which accompanied every letter.

Four all day surgeries were arranged on the following dates in each of the area offices, following the dispatch of the service charge demands. Attendance at the surgeries, which were offered with or without appointment were relatively low:

West Area Service Centre, 155 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JX	Wednesday 9 October 2019	9 attendees
North Area Service Centre, 1 Glasgow House, London, W9 1QY	Thursday 10 October 2019	3 attendees
Central Area Service Centre, 24 Lilestone Street, London, NW8 8SR	Monday 14 October 2019	2 attendees
South Area Service Centre, 137 Lupus Street, London, SW1V 3HE	Tuesday 15 October 2019	6 attendees

The call centre has handled a huge volume of calls on behalf of leasehold operations following the second half yearly service charge demand.

Moving forward we will be looking at alternative ways and methods of engagement and the way in which we communicate surgeries with our residents. Leasehold operations recently launched our first virtual online survey with the newly formed Leasehold 100. The inaugural survey was designed to promote our YouTube style useful videos and our group voted for the topic ‘understanding your lease’. Digital methods of engagement will be run in parallel with static office locations, and the WOW offer to ensure we are developing new methods of engagement to make our service more accessible to our residents.

Rent collection

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 September 2019, current tenancy rent arrears stood at £1,249,930 which represents just 1.37% of the debit. This performance is achieved through helping tenants to sustain their tenancies and just 5 evictions have been carried out in 2019/2020 due to rent arrears.

At the end of September 2019, 1,022 tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit (UC), an increase from 688 cases at the end of March 2019. The arrears for UC cases at the end of September 2019 totalled £395,178.07 with 60.57% of UC cases in arrears.

For the 2018/19 financial year, Westminster Council was in the top three of local authorities for rent collection. This success can be attributed to the Council's partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), which works to ensure tenants have access to money management advice, debt counselling and help with claiming benefits.

There have been 5 evictions carried out due to rent arrears this year. To tackle the increasing debt caused by the roll out of UC, an outreach team has been created to work with those in receipt to help them sustain their tenancy. This team started in January 2019. Recruitment is underway to appoint to the vacant post. A total of £114,126 was collected in former tenant income at the end of September 2019 against an annual target of £177,600. The team are on track to surpass the annual target.

Tenancy reviews

The Council is continuing to undertake tenancy reviews to help ensure residents receive the support they need to sustain their tenancies, as well as to identify potential cases of tenancy fraud. As at the end of October, 407 tenancy reviews have been completed for the year against a target of 500.

Residents receiving these visits were selected from reports showing those who had not been in contact with the Housing Service for some time, and those appearing on our local emergency plans as needing support.

Estate Services

The Estate Services Team continues to be the "eyes and ears" of Westminster Housing, ensuring that a high service level of cleaning and grounds maintenance is provided by our contractors by proactive and progress monitoring of the contracts. The current performance for our contractors is as follows:

- Cleaning: 97.3%
- Grounds maintenance: 95.3%

For the month of October, the team completed 100% of its monthly estate inspections. which resulted in over 100 communal repairs orders being raised to deal with health & safety issues noted during the

inspections. The team also completed 92% of weekly playground inspections, ensuring that any defects noted were recorded, logged and passed to the contractor to carry out the work required.

Estate priorities

The new Housing Services Offer comprising a range of initiatives designed to re-engage with communities was launched at the Lillington and Longmore Gardens estates on 24 October 2019 where we began compiling the first Estate Action Plan setting out residents' priorities. In the following weeks, we will work with residents of 23 estates to create these plans which we will monitor jointly against a set of agreed local targets. Following feedback from Ward Councillors on the planned roll-out, we are accelerating this part of the project with the aim of completing plans for over 100 estates in the New Year. The schedule of walkabouts originally circulated will remain in place, but we will be working with residents and estate representatives where these are in place in the meantime. The initiation of 'Purdah' in the run up to the general election does mean that we will not be able to involve Ward Councillors directly in the establishment of these plans, but we will of course keep them updated throughout this period.

The new Offer also includes a set of refreshed and some new local surgeries, a new Estate Walkabout process where local priorities are monitored, plans for a new Resident Engagement model including an online forum and the implementation of new mobile working technology.

Parking

The installation of Traffic Orders and accompanying signs and lines work to enable parking enforcement on Westminster Council housing estate is approaching completion with a final phase of amendments. Consultation will be undertaken on two estates (Wharnccliffe Gardens and the Hallfield estate), where we are working with residents on a solution following feedback from Residents Associations on the proposals.

Traffic Orders have come into effect in Phase 1A, 1B and 2 locations and enforcement has begun. The Traffic Order for Phase 3 Locations is to be made this week and work is planned to begin lining and signage to bring these online as fully enforceable locations. Work is underway to update permits.

Resident Engagement

Twelve estates have benefitted from having a bulb planting exercise carried out by the resident engagement team, staff volunteers, residents and our grounds maintenance contractors who will assist as part of their commitment to social value. This has been a great exercise to bring all stakeholders together to carry out a fun exercise.

We have four Community Halls projected to be completed within this financial year. The work required for each hall varies depending on the current conditions, however most of the work required includes new kitchen, new bathroom, flooring, decorative works, and FRA works. These refurbishments will ensure that our residents and our customers across the borough have a range of fantastic facilities to use for events and community projects.

1. Barrow Hill – refurbishment works planned to start onsite 11 November 2019 until 25 November 2019

2. Dryburgh Hall – 3-week project planned to start onsite December 2019
3. Grosvenor Hall – Major Works Project start onsite January 2020
4. Pickering Hall – start onsite February/ March 2020

Churchill Gardens Youth Club is to be refurbished in November and launched in January 2020 as part of the Housing Thriving Communities commitment to Churchill Gardens, our largest estate, with other 1000 young people living there.

We are really pleased to have been awarded additional funding of £75,000 per year for the Amberley youth club and £37,500 per year for the Churchill youth club as core funding, through the additional £500,000 made available through the Leader for to support 'hub' youth clubs. This will significantly improve the offer on those estates for young people.

Social Value

Westminster Business Awards

Oakray & GEM - Finalists for Most outstanding business in creating Social Value – Oakray & GEM partnership working in support of St Marylebone Bridge special education school

Morgan Sindall – Finalist for Best business in delivering Apprenticeship Programmes – Morgan Sindall's City Futures Pre-Apprenticeship programme. Received an unscheduled Highly Commended award.

Oakray

Oakray supported the Lillington & Longmore RA by organising a quiz night in September, attended by a team of staff. They also provided prizes, a buffet and a children's play area.

United Living

In October United Living refurbished the kitchen area at Pimlico Toy Library and received a letter of thanks from the Library Coordinator. They have also redecorated the communal lounge at Glastonbury House. Plans are underway for the Churchill Gardens Youth club renovation, United Living will be installing and donating the new kitchen.

Morgan Sindall

After three successful cohorts of their City Futures programme at Portgate community hall, plans have now been confirmed to turn the hall into a permanent construction skills training centre and provide practical working space for ten trainees at a time. MS will be carrying out the renovation works, with their supplier Travis Perkins donating materials. Works are due to start in the coming weeks.

Employment/Apprenticeship

A further eight residents were assisted into work or apprenticeships in October bringing our employment teams total to 43 since April.

Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)

The TMO audit review is now nearing completion. From the seven TMOs inspected there was a total of 258 actions. The remaining actions now stand at 21. In order to enforce improvement, we have served various notices. All seven TMOs have received improvement plans (valid for three months), and five of these have escalated to breach notices (valid for 21 days) with one of these being escalated further to a warning notice (valid for seven days). Warning notices are now being drafted where the breach notice period has expired. The next stage after a warning notice is to remove services or in some circumstances the TMO can be closed-down. Due to the progress made, we are working with each TMO to complete the remaining actions rather than take additional enforcement action.

TMO Repairs

Due to the split in repairs responsibilities between the Council & the TMO, and the fact that some TMOs are part time and do not manage out of hours repairs, TMOs are periodically invoiced for repairs we have done which are a TMO responsibility. Due to the volume of repairs done since the introduction of the call centre, four TMOs have challenged the repairs recharges through legal representation with four TMOs agreeing to pay. The matter has been referred to Bi-Borough Legal and we are waiting a response.

Since this challenge we have introduced better flagging of TMO properties, so the call centre should not automatically raise jobs on TMO managed stock. We have also confirmed that for those TMOs that have challenged, we will be removing the ability for the City Council to raise repairs for TMO managed services, although this is likely to take some time to implement due to IT resources.

TMO Health & Safety Audit

The City Council has recently carried out Health & Safety audits on all eight TMOs. The audits have identified better systems of work for both the individual TMOs and the City Council.

Fire Safety

The programme of fire door upgrades and replacement is underway. Several high priority projects are either on site or due to start in the coming weeks. These include Glastonbury House, six towers at Warwick and Brindley estate, Hall and Braithwaite, Semley House, Hide Tower and four blocks on the Brunel estate. The full fire door upgrade and replacement programme is expected to be completed by 2022.

As leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that their own fire doors are to standard, we have been writing to leaseholders individually to ensure we have confirmation that doors meet current performance requirements. We can also offer leaseholders the opportunity to opt-in, via written agreement, to have their fire doors replaced by the same manufacturer in buildings where we are also replacing tenanted doors as part of planned major works.

Warwick and Brindley estate towers

The external wall insulation work is expected to start in November 2019 and be completed in summer 2020. Balcony work started in January 2019 and is expected to complete by March 2020.

Glastonbury House and Glarus Court

Work is progressing well at Glastonbury House, including important fire safety work which includes the retrofit of sprinklers to flats, new fire doors, fire stopping 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 twenty flats within the next twelve months. Works are likely to start early in 2020.

Torridon House

A new non-combustible façade is being designed for the block following issues being identified during the installation at the pilot flat in the block.

Work is due to commence in November 2019 and be completed by spring 2020. In the interim, individual fire alarm systems (LD2s) will be fitted in each flat. Residents, the TMO and ward members have been updated on the position and the approach has been supported by the London Fire Brigade.

Sprinklers

It is a continued priority for the Council to ensure that the sprinkler programme is delivered to time. The costs of this programme will be considered and agreed as part of the HRA business plan for the 2020/2021 financial year. The funding for Glastonbury House and Glarus Court sprinklers is already included in the business plan for 2019/2021.

An information gathering exercise is proposed for leaseholders in tall buildings to establish their views on the sprinkler roll-out.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Service

Joint working

The report of the 'Anti-Social Behaviour on Estates Task Group' has now been circulated. The Housing team have already begun work on issues identified such as building stronger links with Adult Social Care, closer and more proactive joint working between Housing and the specialist ASB teams and developing a communications campaign to inform residents of the routes and resources available to report and manage ASB issues. The recommendations of the Task Group are being circulated under separate cover and will be responded to in due course.

Noise nuisance

The ASB housing team recently met with managers from environmental health who specialise in responding to reports of noise. Both teams have agreed that there is a need to have a joint working approach to manage repeated cases of noise. This will include cases involving statutory noise such as music and DIY, and those trickier cases involving general living noise.

Both teams have met to jointly agree on a dual process. The teams have already cross-referenced noise cases that have come to the attention of both teams; this shows around 15 cases at present, and they will work on a pilot together to tackle the noise being reported. Actions taken in the joint working process may include joint letters, visits from environmental health and noise case conferences. Plans are also being made to hold a joint noise intervention event in one of our estates that has reported high levels of noise.

Rough sleeping on estates

In response to the significant amount of reports that Housing Services had received regarding rough sleeping on the Hallfield estate, the team worked with several departments to successfully obtain a possession Order for the Hallfield estate on 10 October 2019. On 5 November, High Court Sheriffs were commissioned to serve Notices on the estate, and anyone found on the estate. We are currently awaiting an update on the outcome of this process. Private security patrols appointed while the legal action was pending will remain in place to ensure this has been effective and the Sheriffs will be re-commissioned if not. While some of the rough sleepers may have returned to their country of origin for the Christmas period, the Order will remain in force enabling a 'ready-made' response should they return. The possession order has now been successfully obtained for two estates; Lillington and Longmoore and Hallfield and proves to be a useful route in making residents feel safe and secure.

In addition to the possession order, a floating hub was run by St Mungo's at Pickering Hall on the Hallfield estate for a two-week period. It was successful in assisting rough sleepers in the local area, and several visitors to the hub have been helped to move to potential housing. Unfortunately, most of the Roma community sleeping on Hallfield Estate did not engage with the outreach team and they continued to use the estate to sleep.

A letter has been sent to all residents on the Hallfield estate with an update.

Drug misuse and dealing

The ASB housing team have been working closely with local police teams and the integrated gangs and exploitation unit to tackle drug use and dealing within properties and estates. On 17 October 2019, the police executed 16 warrants linked to gang members and individuals who have been causing issues within the Church street estate, namely around Broadley Street. The police have shared the details of these warrants with us and 9 of the targeted addresses are within our estates.

Case conferences have been held between partners, and we are working together to show a united response against individuals who cause ASB and crime on estates. We are currently working with our legal team to draft up letters before enforcement action from our solicitors to all properties. Following the completion of police investigations and potential convictions, we will be looking at the next steps of tenancy enforcement which may include notices of seeking possession. This will show a clear message that partners work together, and criminal behaviour is not tolerated within our properties or on our estates.

Homelessness Prevention

Housing Solutions Service (HSS)

The Housing Solutions Service (HSS) has been working hard to achieve positive prevention outcomes with families and single adults who present as homeless. In the first half of the year, of the people who were owed a prevention duty, the service has achieved a prevention outcome in 77% of cases. These have been through a range of methods such as Westlets, mediation work to secure a return to family or friends, assistance in securing accommodation found by the applicant as well as mediation to prevent evictions and repossession. This highlights a positive approach in preventing homelessness for cases owed a prevention duty and emphasises the great work being undertaken by HSS.

August saw the pilot and implementation of an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) within the service. The IDVA which has been provided by the Advance Charity is co-located with HSS Colleagues based at the Family Hub in Bruckner Street and the Singles Homelessness Service in the Passage. They will support the service in ensuring the voice of domestic abuse survivors informs every stage of the process whilst working with clients for whom housing and risk of tenancy breakdown is a factor. The role of the IDVA will prove to be an excellent addition to the service and highlights the importance of supporting vulnerable residents.

Additionally, the service is continuing to engage with service users in order to ensure there is continuous improvement. One of the key principles underpinning the Quality Assurance Framework are 'Customers'. In July, the Housing Solutions Service conducted a Service Improvement Group focusing on the allocation scheme, homelessness strategy and temporary accommodation charter. The next session will take place in October with a new cohort of customers who have had interactions with the service."

Commissioning

The Supported Housing Commissioning Team continues to work hard to meet the needs of some of Westminster's most vulnerable residents. There are some exciting developments that will see our supported housing work much closer with health partners, including the re-procurement of our Homeless Health Coordination Project. This service will see a team of experienced workers bring a whole menu of health services to the supported housing projects, including improved access to NHS services as well as drug and alcohol support. The team will roll out a range of training opportunities to support staff to become more trauma informed, ensuring people are supported to develop their strengths and ultimately move towards independence.

This quarter has also seen the team take psychological services out to the market. We are looking for providers to embed psychologists and psychological approaches into our most complex supported housing projects. The service will operate over three years and will bring a consistency to support that is much needed. Research has consistently demonstrated that approaching mental illness through the lens of complex trauma is the most impactful way of supporting people to move forward with their lives. This contract will ensure that adverse childhood experiences and the trauma that people have faced in their lives is put front and centre of all the support that they receive. By ensuring a consistency to support we are confident we will see more positive and sustainable outcomes in people's lives. The submissions came in last week and we are looking forward to awarding and working with health partners from next year.

Finally, the team are working collaboratively with our Homeless Contract Team on an exciting new service that will provide wrap around intensive support to single people who are approaching our Housing Solutions Service as well as a plethora of independent Housing Led services for some of our City's most complex people. The specification will go to the market at the end of November and we will be looking to work with new and innovative support providers to ensure that those that need support, get support at the right time and in the right space. We will be focusing on people's mental wellbeing, ensuring they have the tools necessary to make informed choices and get the housing outcome that they choose.

Trailblazers

Since 1 September 2019, the service has engaged another 35 households, equating to 58 adults and 28 children, providing advice and where appropriate case management to these households. Currently, the total number of households who have engaged with the service sits at 334.

The Trailblazers have appointed a new woman's lead within the team to improve our offer to our female residents. This role will be focusing on how we can engage better with women who may be experiencing domestic abuse, single parents etc and advise those who are at risk of homelessness.

We recognise the need to diversify and create better understanding of marginalised groups across Westminster. We are starting with initiatives to improve the service offer to the female Muslim community with an emphasis on women and homelessness prevention. This will involve developing and delivering training to front line staff, whilst looking to explore opportunities to diversify our outreach offer and general understanding with volunteers and council officers.

Temporary Accommodation: Meeting Demand from Households in Housing Need

Demand for housing has been in line with the projections set out in previous reports to the Committee, with current Temporary Accommodation numbers remaining in the circa of 2,740 and an average of approximately 200 applications per month being made under the new Homeless Reduction Act legislation.

Local authorities have a legal requirement to provide suitable Temporary accommodation if there is reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need. Westminster acquire some of our temporary accommodation by leasing properties from the private sector for both emergency and longer-term use. In Westminster we have an arrangement with around 30 organisations including registered providers.

The Supply team are working closely with providers to ensure front-line teams have the necessary skills, knowledge and commitment to deliver a high-quality service to our temporary accommodation residents. In 2018 a training needs matrix was undertaken with providers and a core training plan developed and led by WCC Supply team to deliver training in the areas of;

- Mental health and well-being awareness
- Domestic Violence
- Safeguarding
- Dementia awareness and

- Managing challenging behaviour

The training programme achieved successful outcomes with over 20 providers signing up to the programme and over 100 staff participating in the training programme so far. Most delegates reported that they saw the value and benefit of the training and expressed higher levels of confidence in supporting WCC temporary accommodation clients occupying provider accommodation. The training programme will continue during 2019/20 to include Inclusion and Diversity Training.

Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024

The draft Strategy was consulted on between July and September and 170 responses have been received which are being analysed. The final Strategy will be completed in December. Overall the ten-point plan was well supported by respondents. The ten-point plan aims to:

- Prevent more people from becoming homeless in the first place – for example, by reaching more people at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage by building a network of prevention and support, working with partners and communities. Proposals include holding events and training in the community to raise awareness about our services and making them more visible through campaigns.
- Improve our services and response when people do become homeless by making our housing services more transparent, accountable and accessible and by setting up a new Partnership Boards to hold them to account and carrying out mystery-shopping exercises.
- Meet the challenges ahead and have a homelessness system fit for the future by becoming a leader in the field of homelessness prevention. We want to use the learning from the Early Intervention Trailblazer Service and make the case to Government on how the welfare system could work better in central London.