



City of Westminster

Housing, Finance, and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Westminster Housing Services

Customer Experience and Digital

The third quarter and start of the winter period delivered approximately 75,000 customer enquiries into the contact centre. This included over 61,000 calls and 12,000 emails. Despite an increase in volumes of over 26% on the previous quarter, the contact centre delivered its best performance for this time of year with 92% of calls answered and 68% within 30 seconds.

Contact centre performance year to date continues to be within target. From April to December 2919, 75% of calls were answered within the 30 second SLA and 93% of all calls were answered.

A total of 4,169 Customer Satisfaction Surveys have been completed year to date and overall 83.6% of residents were satisfied with the services delivered by the contact centre. 72% of residents believed their query to be resolved and both engagement and empathy levels remain above 85%.

As a result of the insight provided in the speech analytics report, additional training has been planned for the contact centre teams. This training is scheduled until the end of March 2020 and will align with each of the five service priorities and with the training previously delivered in November (345 training hours). It will focus on leasehold refresher training, listening and soft skills, and domestic violence. Training in January will focus the repairs improvement plan with both classroom-based training and coaching planned to embed the changes to the repairs processes and embed new ways of working.

Scoping of the Housing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution has commenced. This will include the introduction of a knowledge base to support the quality of advice given to residents across the customer service teams.

Repairs

The repairs service has performed well over the autumn, with no impact on year to date performance from a seasonal increase in responsive repair requests.

Satisfaction with the quality of repairs increased slightly to 83% (year to date 81%) and 87% of repairs were completed on the first visit (year to date 85%). 99% of all emergency repairs were completed on time during November (year to date 99%).

Speech analytics work completed in September 2019 has provided a valuable source of insight into performance of the repairs service from the customer perspective. Several areas for service improvement are currently being addressed, including:

- Improving the accuracy and quality of orders raised to reduce abortive calls and the need for call backs through:
 - Contact centre staff training
 - Enhancements to Locator Plus (order diagnostic tool)
 - Automatic warnings to staff to avoid raising duplicate jobs
- Providing area office staff with up-to-date information on repairs status through:
 - Access to MSi - the main repair contractor's database for live access to job statuses.
- Better management of repairs appointments service through:
 - Greater availability of slots
 - Quicker appointment booking & rebooking

A significant proportion of all repairs calls are plumbing related. The management of leaks has improved in the last year through establishing a dedicated team and introducing a planned preventative maintenance programme. Work has now started to handle plumbing related calls differently at the point of first response. This is at an early stage and a further report will be provided with the next update.

Statutory compliance figures for gas, electricity and water testing remains strong. For November the KPI's were:

- Gas in-flat compliance – 99.8%
- Gas communal boiler compliance – 100%
- Water Tank - testing 98%
- Electrical testing communal – 100%

Voids

The project to improve void management and reduce the time taken to repairs and re-let properties is taking effect. The average time taken to repair and re-let properties in November was 28 calendar days, with an average time of 11 days to complete works.

Fire Safety

The programme of fire door upgrades and replacement is underway with work completed at Glastonbury House. Work at Warwick & Brindley is due to commence in February, with samples due to be presented at resident meetings and pilot installations. Works are also due to commence in February at Semley House and Hyde Tower. Hall and Braithwaite and Brunel have been delayed

pending stakeholder authority to progress. The full fire door upgrade and replacement programme is expected to be completed by 2022.

The impact of fire safety on the scheduling of the major works is currently being considered and further information will be provided verbally at the HFR Policy & Scrutiny Committee meeting on 30 January 2020.

As leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that their own fire doors are to standard, they have been contacted individually to request confirmation that doors meet current performance requirements. Furthermore, leaseholders have the opportunity to opt in, via written agreement, to have their fire doors replaced by the same manufacturer in buildings where tenanted doors are being replaced as part of planned major works. The first pilot for leaseholder opt-in for fire doors is Warwick and Brindley. The leaseholder offer is subject to receiving final costs from service providers.

Warwick and Brindley Estate towers

The external wall insulation work is due to complete in July 2020.

Glastonbury House and Glarus Court

Works at Glastonbury House, such the retrofit of sprinklers to flats, new fire doors, fire stopping and the provision of mobility scooter storage facilities were signed off as complete in December 2019, with a few minor snagging items remaining.

Glarus Court (low rise, extra care scheme) was also identified as a pilot for sprinkler installation last year. This is now under review to ensure the best solution for the building and residents.

Torridon House

A new non-combustible façade is being designed for the block, as a result of issues identified during the installation at the pilot flat in the block.

Works to install individual fire alarm systems (LD2s) within each flat have been completed. Design work in respect of the proposed new façade has been complex, but the design is well advanced. Detailed internal surveys will commence this month and will enable conclusion of the design. Our Health & Safety team are comfortable with the mitigation measures undertaken to date.

Estimated service charges 2020/2021

The new annual service charge invoices will be served in March 2020 for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. The new mailing will include a 'Your service charge explained' leaflet to explain the basis of the service charge and the associated methodology for the calculation of the heads of charge.

Revised templates and letters will shortly be circulated for comment from residents and colleagues. The newly formed Leasehold 100 will be asked for their views on the revised templates and feedback will be taken into consideration where possible. The move to annual billing provides more clarity to residents and allows for one sum to be paid over 12 equal monthly instalments. Residents will be able to budget for the whole financial year ahead and the actual service charge adjustment (a credit or a debit) will be a standalone document, making it easier for residents to scrutinise.

A new and improved leasehold guide is currently with the communications team to provide a well-designed online document. The purpose of the document is to enable residents to 'self-serve' and to obtain as much information as possible at a time and place convenient for them.

The new right to buy offer from January 2020 will offer a bespoke service to residents looking to purchase their property. They will be offered a full interview to discuss the implications of becoming a homeowner and to provide a detailed explanation of the basis of the service charge calculations, as well as any major works planned for the property. It will also provide an opportunity to discuss the obligations under the terms of the lease for both the residents and the council.

Topics such as subletting, insurance, short letting, alterations, permissions and help and assistance will be discussed at length to ensure prospective lessees are provided with as much information as possible before they complete the purchase of their property.

Leases will also be granted for a full 125 years from the date of completion, which will end the issue of the co-terminus lease date for our residents. This change will delay the need for lease extensions for where the first lease in the block was sold in the 1980s.

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 November 2019 current tenancy rent arrears stood at £1,199,279 which represents just 1.48% 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 December 2019, 1,151 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 December 2019 totalled £437,421 with 59% of UC cases in arrears.

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. A review of the function is being undertaken to place the role within the income officers' duties.

A total of £144,597 was collected in former tenant income at the end of November 2019 against an annual target of £177,600. The team are on track to surpass the annual target.

Tenancy reviews

Tenancy reviews continue to ensure residents are receiving the support they need to sustain their tenancies, and to identify potential cases of tenancy fraud. As at the end of December, 466 tenancy reviews had been completed for the year ending 31 March 2020 against a target of 500.

Residents receiving these visits were selected from reports indicating 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 current performance for our Estate Services contractors is as follows:

- Cleaning: 95.78%
- Grounds maintenance: 96.14%

For the month of November the team completed 92% of its monthly estate inspections, which resulted in over 339 communal repairs orders being raised to deal with health & safety issues noted during the inspections. The team also completed 100% of weekly playground inspections, ensuring that any defects noted were recorded, logged and passed to the contractor to carry out the work required.

Performance scores are based on national Housemark scoring standards widely used by councils and RPs. Blocks are scored monthly across a range of elements (e.g.; stairs, lifts, windows, litter levels etc.) against agreed standards set out in picture format. Higher standards have generally been met across the stock, but deficiencies have been raised with the contractor to address.

In November the team completed 92% of its scheduled monthly estate inspections, which resulted in over 339 communal repairs orders being raised to deal with both health & safety issues and repair issues noted during the inspections. The team also completed 100% of weekly playground inspections which are carried out in line with Royal Society for the Protection of Accidents (RoSPA) industry standards, ensuring that any defects noted were recorded, logged and passed to the contractor to carry out the work required.

Phase 1 of the mobile working technology is due to be rolled out to housing operations by the end of January 2020. It will enable staff to raise a wide range of estate-based issues including repairs which will go instantly to the relevant team to undertake the required actions and negate the need for staff to come back into offices to raise requests, freeing them to spend more time on other duties.

An internal Communal Repairs Service pilot on 26 estates (239 blocks) is launching in the final week of January running until the end of May 2020 to coincide with the launch of the new mobile working technology. As part of the service, a range of simple to resolve communal repairs which have previously taken a long period of time to complete will be managed locally. This service will be provided through a dedicated multi-skilled team, and members of the existing compliance team who will be trained to fix problems on estates as they find them, rather than having to raise orders to contractors.

Antisocial Behaviour

Task Group recommendations

Since the circulation for the Task Group recommendations, the ASB Housing team have been working with other departments to improve customer satisfaction and to streamline the customer journey. The work in progress includes creating a defined list of ASB categories, Housing services categories and Compliance categories based on common reports to the customer services team. The list has been created between the teams and the contact centre will receive briefing sessions on how to respond to common customer reports and where the report needs to be sent to ensure the customer receives the right response the first time.

Good progress has been made with increasing the functionality of the online customer reporting platform to make ASB reporting online easier, reduce the time taken to triage cases, provide more advice on ASB and community issues and allow customers to update live cases. The new functionality is due to go live at the end of January 2020.

Noise Campaign

The ASB housing team have been working closely with environmental health officers from the noise service and the communications team to look at how the two services can work jointly to respond to issues. Noise is the highest reported issue from customers, and it is important that they are aware of how they can report noise and how they may be able to resolve the issue independently with a neighbour. Actions in the campaign include a workshop for the staff from the ASB and housing management teams to gain knowledge on noise and environmental health and feel more confident when receiving reports, establishment of regular meetings between the noise service and the housing ASB team to discuss cases and how best to resolve them together, and updated information on the difference between statutory noise and general living. A drop-in event is planned for April for residents to gain information and speak to professionals.

Rough Sleeping

Since legal action was taken against rough sleepers on the Hallfield estate, the problem has eased considerably. Where there have been sporadic reports, we have arranged a prompt enforcement response to address this. We are in continuing discussions with Legal Services to ensure that if the problem returns on a significant scale, that we remain ready to act swiftly to respond.

Joint Walkabouts and working

To increase visibility on estates and put into practice holistic approaches to ASB and nuisance, the ASB team have been conducting and arranging a series of joint walkabouts with internal and external partners. A large walkabout took place in December with the ASB team alongside CCTV engineers, housing service advisors, compliance officers, local police officers and building surveyors. The walkabout was in the West area and was in response to youths loitering, drug dealing, and access being gained into a building. The group visited ASB hotspots and shared departmental knowledge on how to jointly respond to ASB and options for prevention and safety improvement in the community. Further joint walkabouts are being planned and will continue to take place each month.

Estate priorities

Following the launch of the new Housing Services Offer in October 2019, the following progress has been made on strands of re-engagement:

- **‘My Estate Walkabouts’** - nine My Estate Walkabouts have been carried out across various estates in the borough. These are continuing according to the published programme for this year.
- **‘My Estate Action Plans’** - completed 23 My Estate Action Plans by the end of 2019
- **Resident engagement** - five new resident groups (Dufours Place, Warwick Crescent sounding board, Mozart, Queen’s Park, Ascot and Windsor Gardens) have been set up
- **Online resident engagement** - 215 residents (both tenants and leaseholders) have signed up to be part of ‘Westminster Connected’, our online engagement group. Lessees have already been engaged in consultation activities and the consulting with the wider group will begin early in the new year on areas that need to be improved.

- **Housing Surgeries** - have been increased to 14 including Marylebone and Church St libraries, providing residents with access to housing staff close to where they live and already receive other services
- **Westminster on Wheels** - over 1600 residents visited Westminster on Wheels, with 95% of them saying that they were happy that the service was on their estate
- **Mobile working** - piloting new technology in January 2020 to allow reporting of minor communal repairs more efficiently, as well as a dedicated repairs team that will be on hand to respond to minor communal repairs quicker

This initiative will be built on by creating a web page for the My Estate Action Plans so that residents can track our progress online.

Parking

Consultation on the final set of Orders incorporating amendments identified during earlier consultation phases has now concluded and these are being reviewed at the beginning of January.

A solution for residents of the Wharnccliffe Gardens and Hallfield estates is being sought, where some concerns were expressed by the respective Residents Associations on the proposals.

Enforcement has begun across the City with most areas now covered by Orders. Progress continues to be made on updating permits and completing lining and signage installation.

Resident engagement and Halls

Over 50 residents joined Westminster City Council staff to help with bulb planting across 12 estates over the autumn period. Since holding the events, three existing resident groups have sought help to set up community gardening projects. This initiative helped with the drive to raise visibility of staff on estates and achieved positive coverage in the press.

Four new residents' groups were set up this quarter at Dufours Place, Queen's Park Court, Ascot and Windsor, and Warwick Crescent. We have continued to provide assistance with the new residents' groups at Grosvenor and Regency, and West Streets and Oaktree. At Grosvenor, residents have been supported to produce governance documents and hold an away day to focus on their estate priorities.

A Westender's Residents Network is being re-established in the Soho and Covent Garden area to ensure the smaller blocks spread across the area have a way of coming together as there are no halls available locally.

19 annual reviews were undertaken of residents' associations to ensure they had good governance and to identify any support they may need. Assistance was also provided with recruitment drives and grant applications.

Tollgate Hall, a brand-new hall for residents, was handed over in December and a launch is being planned for January / February. A party for nearly 100 residents on the Tollgate estate was held in the new hall as a thank you to residents for being patient whilst their estate was being redeveloped.

In Queens Park over 30 elderly residents enjoyed festivities and activities to establish a social network and help prevent social isolation.

Both Barrow Hill and Dryburgh Hall have been refurbished this quarter and are now much more attractive venues for residents to use.

Community Development and social value

Churchill Gardens Youth Club has now been refurbished with a full new kitchen being provided by United Living as part of their social value commitment.

Other social value examples include United Living redecorating the Warwick Lounge at Glastonbury House for elderly residents, as well as donating Christmas tree, lights and decorations. They also decorated and put up new shelving for Pimlico Toy Library including painting.

All construction partners continue to provide social value to our Westminster residents and 61 residents have been supported into employment or apprenticeships since April.

Tenant Management Organisations

TMO 5-year review (Audits)

The TMO audit review is now nearing completion. Odhams Walk TMO has completed all outstanding actions and only 17 actions remain to be closed across the remaining TMOs. It is the intention to get all remaining actions closed by the end of March 2020. However, it is anticipated that a Warning Notices will need to be served on a few TMOs early in the new year to ensure compliance with these target dates.

If TMOs do not comply with the audit requirements, further enforcement action will be agreed, which could involve removal of services or potential closure.

TMO Health & Safety Audit

The City Council has recently carried out H&S audits on all eight TMOs. The audits have recommended better systems of work for both the individual TMOs and the City Council. Two of the eight TMOs are working through the audit recommendations with their health & safety advisor. The remaining six TMOs are currently appointing a H&S advisor collectively to review the recommendations and provide on-going H&S support. TMOs have a compliance deadline of the end of March 2020.

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 220 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 Council is required to offer suitable Temporary Accommodation (TA) to accepted homeless households pending allocation into longer term accommodation.

Westminster continues to deliver a wide range of support to homelessness families who occupy temporary accommodation which includes;

- Support to households to access employment and move into work
- Debt advice and money management
- Outreach support to where people live in temporary accommodation



There is a focus in 2020/21 to achieve the targets set within the Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024. Supporting the plan to achieve:

- A clear, effective focus on preventing and responding effectively to homelessness
- Prioritising settled housing by developing a well-functioning housing system – availability and choice, homes people can afford, growth of supply
- Partners working together, bringing insight, creativity and determination to build on success and go further to reduce homelessness

Currently 44% of temporary accommodation is within the Westminster borough and 56% is outside.

Housing Solutions Service

The Housing Solutions Service (HSS) delivered in partnership by RMG, Shelter and Passage, continues to work hard in achieving positive prevention outcomes with families and single adults who present as homeless. Last month, the service achieved a prevention outcome in 88% of cases, which were owed a prevention duty. These have been through a range of methods such as our private sector Lettings team, Westlets, mediation work to secure a return to family or friends, or to prevent evictions and repossession, and financial assistance to households who found their own accommodation in the private sector.

As part of the continuous improvement and development of the service, and following feedback from customers and consultation with various stakeholders, there has been a review of the effectiveness of Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs) over the last quarter with a focus on improved customer engagement with the plan, individualised content, including wider categories and activities. The new plans will come into effective as of January 2020 and will enable both staff and customers to agree

and work to plans that have more tailored information, providing clearer and more defined activities which will enable the plans to be more meaningful and increase positive outcomes.

The WCC HSS contract continues to be one of the highest performing contracts in delivering its social value commitments throughout Westminster. Through the contracts comprehensive social value programme, they have delivered activities focusing on; employment, supporting economic independence, having a positive impact on quality of life, as well as creating capacity for resilient communities. Some recent activity and highlights are the RMG sponsorship during December of a Christmas market stall on Tachbrook for start-ups and community groups, and the award RMG's community grants to the three selected charities; MEWSO, who work hard on tackling social isolation amongst Middle Eastern Women, the Connaught Opera who arrange and perform concerns for older people across Westminster and the Door Step Library who provide opportunities for children to read and learn outside of schools and libraries, who may be in areas of disadvantage. The cheques were presented by RMG Managing Director Hugh McGeever at an afternoon tea an afternoon tea event hosted by Westminster council at in City Hall.

The contract has had an additional staffing resource for the financial years 18/19 and 19/20 of an additional 40 posts (financial commitment of £1.5m per year), this resource commitment is being reviewed for 2020/21, a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities has been completed and a further review of the services requirements is being completed with a final decision on the additional resource needed by end of January 2020. It is anticipated that this commitment will reduce for 20/21 following the delivery model changes that have been implemented through December and January and as processes further improve following the initial change and impact of demand following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018.

Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024

The draft Strategy was consulted on between July and September and 180 responses have been received which are being analysed. The final Strategy will be published in January. Overall the ten-point plan was well supported by respondents and 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.