



<b>Committee date:</b>	<b>February 2020</b>
<b>Report Of:</b>	<b>Neil Wightman, Director of Housing</b>
<b>Portfolio:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Housing Services</b>
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	<b>Andrea Luker</b> <a href="mailto:aluker@westminster.gov.uk">aluker@westminster.gov.uk</a>

### General Update

- 1.1 It's nine months since responsibility for housing service delivery transferred to Westminster Council. A full suite of performance information is provided at Appendix A, giving an overview of current service standards and the progress that has been made in delivering improvements. All figures are as at the end of December 2019 (P9). This report draws attention to key areas of performance and provides a narrative to the data in Appendix A. Targets were set by the council's client team prior to the housing service returning in-house. All targets require an improvement on previous performance levels and were benchmarked against published performance for high performing London boroughs.
- 1.2 Highlights within the portfolio include improvements in contact centre and repairs service performance, and changes to the housing local offer rolled from October 2019. The housing contact centre has performed well, with 75% of calls answered within 30 seconds, against the corporate target for contact centres of 70%. The Westminster on Wheels initiative, providing a mobile surgery service has also been a success, demonstrating the Council's commitment to providing residents with local, face to face services. Over 1600 residents have visited the bus to the end of December and 94% were very happy or happy with the bus being on the estate.
- 1.3 The Director of Housing is overseeing delivery of a service improvement programme, designed to support staff to improve performance to a benchmarked upper quartile and provide the opportunity for residents to influence housing services. The programme will also integrate the housing management service into the council and provide staff with the tools and infrastructure needed to provide high quality services.

## 2 Customer services - Contact Centre

- 2.1 Since integration the contact centre performance has been positive, with call handling performance remaining within target. Year to date performance to the end of December 2019:
  - 162,851 total calls received 75% of calls were answered within 30 seconds (target of 70%)
  - 72% of calls were resolved on first contact (target of 60%)
  - 84% of residents were satisfied with call handling - measured through a post-call survey immediately after call handling (target 80%)
  - 35,614 email enquiries received

- 2,258 enquiries were received on digital channels, 31% via My Westminster Housing, 36% via Home Swapper and 33% via Twitter.

## **2.2 Third quarter performance**

The third quarter and start of the winter period delivered circa 75,000 customer enquiries into the contact centre. This increased volume is the seasonal norm, with many repair requests being weather related. Contacts 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 for the third quarter.

## **2.3 Satisfaction**

A total of 4,169 Customer Satisfaction Surveys have been completed year to date and overall

- 84% of residents are satisfied with the services delivered by the Contact Centre an increase in satisfaction of 2% compared to Q2
- 72% of residents believed their query to be resolved and both engagement and
- empathy levels remain above 85%.

## **2.4 Complaints and Member Enquires**

- 662 complaints have been received this year
- 90% completed within the 10-day target
- Only 7% of complaints have escalated from stage 1 to stage 2
- 820 members' enquiries have been received year to date with 94% responded to in target.

**2.5** A speech analytics project, analysing 30,000 calls was undertaken in September and the results have helped us understand the drivers of customer contact, reasons for service failure and tracking residents' emotions as they interact with the service. As a result of the insight provided in the speech analytics report additional training has been planned for the contact centre teams, this training has been scheduled until the end of March 2020. Training in January has focused on repairs improvements with both classroom-based training and coaching to embed the changes to the repairs processes and embed new ways of working.

**2.6** Scoping the Housing CRM solution has begun which will include the introduction of a knowledgebase to support the quality of advice given to residents across the customer service teams.

## **3 Repairs, Voids and Health & Safety**

### **3.1 Performance**

The repairs service performed well over the Autumn, with the seasonal increase in responsive repairs not impacting on year to date performance. The service is improving with incremental improvements across the KPIs:

- Year to date 85% of repairs were completed on the first visit (Dec - 89%)
- Year to date satisfaction with the repairs service is at 83% (Dec – 85%)
- Statutory services relating to electrical testing, gas safety checks and water tank monitoring all continue to perform very well.

### **3.2 Improving the repairs service**

Improving the service is a key priority for the Director of Housing, with particular focus on keeping appointments, quality of work and timeliness of the repair. Work across the housing team and with contractors is underway to make the necessary improvements over the course of the year, 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
- Staff with access to up to date information on repairs status through:
  - Providing area office staff with access to MSi - the main repair contractor's database for live access to job status'.
- Better management of repairs appointments service through:
  - Greater availability of slots
  - Quicker appointment booking & rebooking

### **3.3 Leaks and plumbing**

A significant proportion of all repair 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.

### **3.4 Voids**

A void services improvement team established to work as a collaborative group to drive improvement across the service is taking effect. The time taken to repair and re-let void properties has reduced from 57 days for the year 18/19 to 45 days for 19/20. The target of 28 days average time to repair and re-let properties was met in November and December.

### **3.5 Satisfaction**

New tenant satisfaction with the letting process dipped in April so a courtesy call was introduced, to all new tenants within a week of tenancy commencement. This has allowed any issues to be remedied early in the tenancy and reinforces the commitment to listen to customers. New tenant satisfaction year to date is 86% and measured 95% in December.

### **3.6 Major works**

Programme delivery is progressing with approximately £35m of major works investment on site and a further £4m due to commence in the forthcoming weeks. Schemes were held back during Purdah following budget changes.

## **4 Neighbourhood services**

### **4.1 Local offer**

The new Housing Services offer was launched in October 2019 designed to increase the visibility of the service locally and to rebuild trust with residents. The offer includes

- Estate Walkabouts taking place across various estates in the borough as a published programme for 19/20.
- Estate Action Plans – 29 pilot plans have been completed and will be tracked with residents on a monthly basis and available on the website
- We now have 14 housing surgeries providing residents with more access to housing staff
- Over 1,600 residents visited *Westminster on Wheels* with 94% saying that they were happy that the service was on their estate, and nearly 3/4 of issues resolved on the bus.
- We launched in January our new mobile working solution for estate staff allowing them to report communal repairs more efficiently whilst out of the office through a mobile app integrated with the housing management database.
- We are piloting a new minor communal repairs service which will develop a new approach to proactively addressing minor repairs on estates.

## **4.2 Resident engagement**

- Over 50 residents joined staff on 12 estates to plan thousands of bulbs for the Spring.
- Three resident groups are setting up community gardening projects with our support.
- We established four new resident associations this year and
- In January held a celebratory lunch for the Chairs of all the resident associations hosted by the Lord Mayor
- A new hall for residents of Tollgate Gardens was handed over in December and a Launch is being planned for April. A party for over 90 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.
- Both Barrow Hill and Dryburgh Hall were refurbished in Q3 and are now much more attractive venues for residents to use.
- Churchill Gardens youth club has been refurbished with a new kitchen donated by United Living as part of their social value commitment.

## **4.3 Westminster Connected**

215 residents (both tenants and leaseholders) have signed up to be part of 'Westminster Connected', our new 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.

## **5 Tenancy reviews**

- 5.1** Tenancy reviews continue, both to help ensure residents receive the support they need to sustain their tenancies, and to identify potential cases of tenancy fraud. As at the end of November, 446 tenancy reviews have been completed to the end of P9 against a target for the full year of 500.
- 5.2** 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 local emergency plans as needing support.

## **6 Antisocial behaviour**

### **6.1 Improving satisfaction**

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, housing services and Compliance categories based on common reports to the customer services team. This should improve the information and understanding in the call centre of common customer reports
- We have increased the functionality for online customer reporting making ASB reporting online easier. It will reduce the time taken to triage cases which will free up more time to deal with cases.

### **6.2 Noise**

The ASB housing team have been working closely with environmental health officers from the noise service and with the communications team to look at how both services can work jointly to respond to noise. Noise is the highest reported issue from customers, and it is important that they know how they can report noise, different types of noise and how they may be able to resolve their own noise issue with a neighbour. Actions in the campaign include;

- A noise workshop for ASB and housing management teams to gain knowledge on noise and environmental health
- Regular meetings between the noise service and the housing ASB team to discuss noise cases and how best to resolve them together and

- Updated information and videos 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.

### **6.3 Joint walkabouts**

We have taken part in a series of joint walkabouts to ASB hotspots with internal and external partners including CCTV engineers, housing service advisors, compliance officers, local police officers and building surveyors to visit ASB hotspots. This joint approach will help to better find solutions to prevent ASB and make the community feel safer.

## **7 Income Collection**

### **7.1 Rent collection**

- Rent collection at the end of December 2019 was 98.57% against a target of 98.5%. As a comparison to other comparable London Boroughs, rent collection is consistently within the top three for rent collection.
- At the end of December 2019 current tenancy rent arrears stood at 1.41% of the rent roll.
- 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. 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.
- A total of £174,788 was collected in former tenant income at the end of December 2019 against an annual target of £177,600. The service is on track to surpass the annual target.

### **7.2 Leasehold service charge collection**

- £991,000 (96.9%) of service charges has been collected against a challenging target of £1,160,000 (98%)
- Major works aged debt is also well on track to meet the annual target of £1.16m. The aged debt sums are lower than many comparable London Boroughs and are good reflection of the arrears recovery work undertaken by the team.
- The favourable payment terms offered Westminster City Council which are above and beyond the terms of the lease play a strong part in supporting residents with the ability to pay their major works service charge invoices.

### **7.3 Leasehold improvements**

- The billing process, particularly around timing, accuracy and frequency of bills has been improved. Redesigned actual service charge invoices were despatched at the end of September 2019 with invoices in simpler format.
- The estimated service charge demands for the period April 2020 to March 2021 will be served in March 2020 as a single annual estimated demand rather than two half yearly demands.
- 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.
- The proposed changes and the new format will be tested by a focus group of leaseholders prior to implementation in March 2020.

### **7.4 Right to buy**

A new right to buy offer from January 2020 provides applicants with better pre-purchase advice. Tenants are offered an interview to discuss the implications of becoming a homeowner and to a detailed explanation of the basis of the service charge calculations

and any major works planned for the property. It also provides 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.