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Portfolio: Business, Licensing and Planning

The Report Of: Councillor Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning

Report Author and Contact Details: Jack Shaw, Portfolio Advisor
jshaw@westminster.gov.uk

1 City for All – Business, Licensing and Planning Priorities

Thriving Economy

West End Recovery- West End Pop-up Project

- 1.1 The pop-up timeline is being aligned across the West End with key animation and cultural event milestones for each area. The first two pop-ups opened in the West End from 10 June, showcasing the work of up-and-coming London-based artists and creatives. Artists involved include Joyce Fraser (founder of Black Heroes Foundation), Lito Apostolakou (installation and mixed-media artist). A third, Sarah Porter, an abstract painter, will open mid-July. In partnership with NWECC and property owners, a call-out was launched in June for pop-up occupiers for up to 10 spaces in Oxford Street, Regent Street and Mayfair. 73 applications for pop-ups were received.

West End Recovery- Westminster Investment Service

- 1.2 The new service officially launched on 29 June at the Radisson Blu Edwardian Hampshire Hotel. The launch event included an expert panel and was delivered in a hybrid fashion of in-person and virtual attendance to maximise attendance/engagement whilst observing social distancing requirements.

West End Recovery- Westminster Animation Strategy

- 1.3 A 'calendar' has been developed incorporating partner-lead activities and campaigns from June to December 2021. Discussions are ongoing with partners across the West End and the GLA to identify opportunities to collaborate and widen the programme of events (<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/whats-on-westminster/events>). A BID and Landowner roundtable was held on 20 April to discuss. Feasibility work is being undertaken with regards to new proposals across each of the animation strands.

West End Recovery- Future Occupiers

- 1.4 The programme board meets quarterly and we work closely with London & Partners on the delivery of the programme. Between board meetings there is a regular sharing of pipeline enquiries and programme updates. We took part in the Virtual Trade mission for northeast Asia - Japan, Korea and Hong Kong (12-15 July) and the lead generation agency (OCO Consulting) mobilised theme workshops in June. Further proposition workshops have been planned for July.

Al fresco hospitality

- 1.5 Al fresco hospitality reopened on 12 April 2021. As of publication, over 700 pavement licences have been granted to restaurants to provide nearly 15,000 seats for outdoor food and beverage service until 30 September 2021. The current Government scheme for al-fresco dining is in the process of being

extended to September 2022, with no additional funding provided. Officers are actively engaging with MHCLG and the LGA to ensure an understanding of the challenges and costs the council will face.

Kickstart

- 1.6 A Kickstart Insight Day was held on 2 June 2021 at City Hall, inviting along all of the Westminster residents who have applied for one of the 30 internal opportunities to hear directly from the various hiring managers providing the Kickstart opportunities within their teams. Officers are in the process of finalising the onboarding and induction arrangements for the first 10-15 new joiners to the City Council via Kickstart. The Department for Work and Pensions continue to struggle to cope with demand and lack capacity to support rollout of the national programme. Referral rates for Westminster residents have been lower than anticipated given the number of residents claiming Universal Credit and eligible for Kickstart in the borough and this matter is being examined urgently with DWP.

Westminster Wheels

- 1.6 To date, 17 young people from Westminster have been trained through the Westminster Wheels (WW) project. The second cohort finishes employment with WW in September and with a third cohort in November. Three out of our first cohort of five trainees have started work at local bike retailers, another has recently had a work trial. Their soft skills, confidence and sense of purpose has increased tremendously. We are continuing to prepare our trainees for work placements with our employer partners. The project is now recruiting for a fourth cohort of trainees to join the project and our aim is to have supported 28 unemployed residents into careers in the bike sector by 2021/22. Plans for the next quarter include extending our opening hours from the initial phase of the project, making links with the Council's Cycle Hangar Scheme to explore opportunities to promote Wheels and progressing a partnership with DWP to supply jobseekers with bikes, offering a low-cost way of transport and revenue for the project from bike sales.

Vibrant Communities

Street Entertainment

- 2 Following the launch of the policy, we have received 99 licence applications and issued 83 licences. A dedicated team of City Inspectors has been deployed to enable engagement with performers in the regulated area, working 7 days a week from 12:00 – 22:00. The team proactively patrol the regulated area responding to complaints and engaging with licensed and unlicensed performers to raise awareness of the new policy and ensure compliance. Apart from Covent Garden, we have seen a high level of compliance with the policy with most performers applying for a licence after engagement with our officers or not returning. The first busking forum is also being launched next month, and officers are working towards the first 3-month review of the impact of the policy.

Gambling Licensing Policy

- 2.1 With the review of the Gambling Licensing Policy, there is an opportunity to tighten our policy approach to provide residents, responsible authorities and the Licensing Sub-Committee the ability to challenge the "aim to permit" principles. It is intended to undertake consultation on the proposed new policy at the end of July for a period of 8 weeks. The new policy will be brought before Full Council in November for consideration and adoption.

City Plan

- 2.2 The City Plan 2019-40 has now replaced the policies in the 2016 City Plan and 2007 Unitary Development Plan and since April, has been used alongside the new London Plan 2021 to determine all planning applications in the city.

Environmental Supplementary Planning Document

- 2.3 The council launched the Environmental Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for formal consultation on 17 May, which ran for six weeks until 28 June. The Environmental SPD provides further guidance on the City Plan's environment policies, supporting our City for All aspirations to create a

greener, cleaner and healthier city. It gives details on how developers can meet the highest sustainability standards covering issues such as air quality, local environmental impacts, green infrastructure, flood risk, energy and waste. We have held a series of workshops with stakeholders and interested parties covering each of the themes in the document. The discussions at each of the workshops will be reviewed alongside written submissions to help shape the final iteration of the SPD, which will be published later this year. The SPD is central to our ambition to combat the climate emergency. It gives a greater prominence and weight to environment issues than the previous planning framework and represents a step change on issues such as sustainable retrofitting of historic properties or protection of tranquil spaces from noise pollution where the council had previously issued informal guidance. We welcome the input received from all stakeholders to ensure the final SPD is ambitious, robust, forward-looking and exceeds expectations.

Beneficial Ownership

- 2.4** The Government has or intends to have registers of beneficial ownership for three different types of assets: companies, properties and land, and trusts. Information on the beneficial ownership of companies (the People with Significant Control (PSC) register) has been publicly available since 2016. In June G7 Finance Ministers agreed to implement and strengthen registries of company beneficial ownership information in their respective jurisdictions. The register for trusts was introduced in 2017 and is not public. The Government is yet to publish the detail for a public beneficial ownership register for UK property. At this stage, prior to legislation on the existence of beneficial ownership on property, it would be premature to filter activity according to a future judgement on beneficial ownership.

Planning Engagement

- 2.5** A draft Early Community Engagement Guidance for developers was consulted upon with resident groups and developer representatives in March 2021. The informal guidance promotes the use of digital engagement methods in combination with traditional engagement methods and encourages more transparency and early engagement with communities on development proposals. A finalised version of the guidance is expected to be published in June, subject to further consultation.

Planning

- 2.6** Site visits are now being undertaken where they are necessary to enable the determination of the application and where Covid secure arrangements have been put in place by the applicant. Further review of the Site visit protocols for planning applications will be undertaken following the Government's announcement of the guidelines that will remain in place from 19 July 2021 onwards with the anticipation that normal service can resume.
- 2.7** The department currently has 3,219 planning and related applications that are valid and under consideration. Whilst this number has increased since March (2,590), this is in large part in response to an increase in the number of applications being submitted during the first 6 months of 2021 compared to during 2020. Since 1 January 4,143 planning and related applications have been submitted. Based on this number and submission rate, the projected number of applications for 2021 is likely to be circa 8,000. This projected upturn in application numbers would reverse the significant decline in application numbers observed in 2020 during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic when 7,562 planning and related applications were submitted during the calendar year. A total of circa 8,000 applications for 2021 would mark the beginning of a transition back towards the levels of application submission experienced in the years preceding the pandemic when 9,332 applications were submitted in 2019 and 9,797 in 2018. Albeit it should be noted that there was an existing underlying trend for a fall in application numbers prior to the pandemic as a result of a variety of factors, including increased scope of permitted development rights and developer uncertainty connected to the period preceding Brexit.
- 2.8** The Planning Enforcement Team currently have 2,830 live enforcement investigations. This compares to 2,718 live enforcement investigations in March 2021.

Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES)

- 2.9** The Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) continues to deliver education and training programmes that support residents. We are currently running a successful Level 3 programme for learners seeking careers in the education sector, with 19 learners studying until July. To date, 7 (37%) have gained employment and are now working on completing their qualification in school settings. This programme has always performed well for learners looking for employment pathways, with around 70% gaining employment from a full cohort. WAES continues to celebrate the success of learners and we are hosting an exciting line-up of celebratory events this summer, including the Learner Awards in July.

Smart City

Digital Planning Tools

- 3** A digital strategy for Place Shaping and Town Planning is currently in development to ensure appropriate digital tools are identified, prioritised and implemented to ensure an easier service for residents and service users to interact with and make planning applications simpler.

4 Cabinet Member Key Decisions

Since the last Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee, I have formally approved the following key decisions:

- Adoption of the Westminster City Plan 2019 - 2040 and Policies Map Cabinet Member Report

Since the last Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee, the following key decisions are yet to be formally approved:

- Review of the Local List of Information Requirements for Planning and Associated Applications: Agreement to Consult
- Harley Street Area Partnerships BID Ballot
- Local Development Scheme
- Revision of the Licensing Policy under the Licensing Act 2003
- Queen's Park Neighbourhood Plan