



City of Westminster

# Committee Report

**Meeting or Decision Maker:** Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** September 2022

**Classification:** General Release

**Title:** Communal, Community and Environmental Improvements

**Wards Affected:** All

**Policy Context:** This work contributes to the Fairer Housing agenda in seeking to improve the quality of services to residents

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Lisa Begum

**Key Decision:** None

**Financial Summary:** n/a

**Report of:** Debbie Jackson, Executive Director Growth Planning and Housing

## **1. Executive Summary**

This report provides an update on the work of the housing team to improve services delivered to the council's housing estates across the borough. It focuses on initiatives to improve the environment in which our residents live, including

- Gardening
- Recycling
- Estate security
- Community initiatives

## **2. Gardening**

### **2.1 Trees**

Over the last year 56 new trees were planted across the council's housing estates and 32 are planned for the next year. We are currently identifying more locations where additional trees will benefit our estates and communities.

### **2.2 Green Flag Awards**

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards professionally managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

The Green Flag Award is managed under license from the UK Government Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities by Keep Britain Tidy who also administers the scheme in England.

We are very pleased that we have retained our Green Flag status for:

- Churchill Gardens
- Lillington and Longmoore Gardens
- Lisson Green

The standard of grounds maintenance has not only been maintained but we have continued to make improvements. We are grateful for the hard work and dedication from our contractors, resident groups, and volunteers. In addition to this we won the coveted English Heritage Site Accreditation for Lisson Green, which is awarded for conservation of historical features to a high standard and maintenance of their historic character and appearance.

Over the course of the next two years the housing service is working towards achieving Green Flag accreditations at the Hallfield Estate and Brunel Estate. Residents appreciate good gardening on their estates, and we welcome the opportunity to work together to achieve these awards in this part of the borough.

### **2.3 Lillington & Longmoore Sensory Children's Garden**

We were proud to open the first children's sensory garden on our housing estates in August 2022. Working with residents an underused outdoor space has been transformed for the primary use of vulnerable children who require sensory stimulation. Sensory experiences help children to develop and sense of the world around them. We hope that the garden will provide endless opportunities for learning and development, and we look forward to carrying out similar projects in different parts of the borough to provide opportunities to more children.

### **2.4 Greening**

Working with resident groups and our contractors we are continuing to locate areas that require additional greening. This includes replacing dead shrubs and improving spaces that are not being utilised. We are currently working on projects at Lydford Estate and Wharncliffe gardens to create more green spaces where tree roots are causing the hard surfaces to crack. By greening these areas, we will provide a long-term solution to the issues creating more environmentally friendly areas whilst reducing the need for future costly repairs to the surfaces.

## **3. Recycling**

### **3.1 Food waste recycling roll out**

Between 2019 and 2022 we tested the collection of food waste across 7,000 properties and in February we extended collection from over 19,000 properties. 448 tonnes of food waste have been collected since the start of March this year. The scheme will be extended to the Maida Vale ward and a door knocking campaign for this starts at the beginning of September.

### **3.2 Improved waste and recycling infrastructure on our estates**

We are currently in the process of applying for capital spend to improve the facilities for waste and recycling on estates. The Waste and Recycling team are currently working with the Housing teams to identify the improvements required.

## **4. Estate Security**

We are setting up a borough wide roving estate security patrol pilot, focusing on the communal areas of housing blocks and estates for a period of 6 months. As this is a pilot, the initial cost will be borne by the HRA (Housing Revenue Account), however, if the service were implemented more widely the cost would have to be covered by a stock wide service charge.

We previously set up a patrol for limited period funded by a ward budget to cover the Bayswater ward which was successful at reducing anti-social behaviour in the area.

The estate patrol service will consist of two branded patrol officers in a dedicated marked patrol vehicle. Designated blocks and estates will be visited within the Westminster estate to identify, remedy, and deter ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour). Officers will be tasked with delivering a high-quality service, demonstrating excellent customer services skills, liaising with residents and key stakeholders. They will also

attend emergencies, and deal with hazards located on the patrols such as blocked fire escapes.

The service is not intended to be a policing enforcement role when dealing with ASB. The main role is to deter ASB, to observe and gather intelligence. They will communicate where it is safe to do so, and inform the housing teams, and local law enforcement of any conflict, to enable them to formulate a plan to alleviate any issues.

The service will run 7 days per week and shifts are expected to be 10 hours long. The core hours of operation will be 8pm to 6am with the flexibility to change the hours based on business needs.

The pilot will begin on four estates: Lisson Green; Hallfield; Lydford and Lillington and Longmore. There will be flexibility to move the service to other areas of concern within the borough by using available resources without additional cost.

## **5. Residents First Programme and Community Thursdays**

The Residents First programme aims to deliver a new and revitalised housing service following the recent restructure and addressing the housing management priorities of the new administration.

As part of the programme, we have introduced Community Thursdays for teams across the housing department, at all levels, to visit estates, provide a visible presence, and talk to residents about their housing service. Local councillors are invited to join us, to listen to the issues of importance to our residents. Visits are advertised in advance on the housing pages of the council's website and on posters on estate notice boards. We encourage any issues to be raised and try to assist there and then. If the matter is more complex, issues are logged on a mobile application and triaged to the appropriate team for resolution.

Community Thursdays have been actively promoted within the housing and wider GPH (Growth Planning and Housing) directorate to encourage staff to attend, and attendance levels have been very good. We are continually reviewing how to make this initiative more effective for all parties by encouraging feedback, holding regular meetings on progress, and removing any obstacles. Visits are scheduled to the end of November, and we aim to visit estates on a rotational basis every four months. Our visits include blocks managed by tenant management organisations. Separate visits to some of our housing needs homeless schemes have also been arranged with senior management and Cllr Begum.

As of 25 August, we had achieved the following:

- 11 Community Thursdays (first was on 16/6)
- 34 estates visited across 16 wards

- 140 different members of staff have taken part
- 10 different councillors have joined us
- Over 3100 doors knocked

The mobile solution being used on Community Thursdays is an expansion of a new application that allows staff to report any housing related issue on a mobile phone or other hand-held device. The app is integrated with our housing management and customer relationship management software and negates the need to complete time-consuming administration after the visits. Issues captured to date are displayed below:

Case Type / Property Type	Block	Property	Grand Total
<b>ASB</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Estate Services</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>46</b>
Abandoned Goods / Fly tipping		4	4
Cleaning & Grounds Maintenance Issue	9	28	37
Communal Access Requests	1	4	5
<b>Housing Management</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>78</b>
Abandoned Goods		2	2
Abandoned Properties		1	1
Change to Tenancy		1	1
Fobs		2	2
Housing	3	49	52
Moving Home		10	10
Permission for Pets		1	1
Vulnerable Resident		9	9
<b>Income</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
Rent Account Query/payment		4	4
Universal Credit/Benefits		2	2
<b>Leasehold Operations</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Not Housing Services</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Parking, sheds, garages</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

<b>Pest Control</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Repairs</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>423</b>

Our commitment to a local presence is also demonstrated through the addition of new housing surgeries. The surgeries were established in August on the Lillington and Longmoore estate and in Soho, with an additional surgery due to commence on the Mozart estate in September. The surgeries are advertised to residents and so far, have been positively received and attended. They provide residents with a way to speak to our teams in person, a little closer to their home.

Finally, following the housing re-organisation we are currently writing to all residents introducing their new housing officer and repairs surveyor. The letters give a description of their role and provide a picture of the staff to help residents get to know their local housing team.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact:**

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