



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 19th April, 2023**, Rooms 18.01 & 18.03, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Gillian Arrindell, Robert Eagleton, David Harvey, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Patricia McAllister (Chair), Alan Mendoza, and Cara Sanquest.

**Also Present:** Councillor Liza Begum (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Councillor Matt Noble (Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters), Damian Hemmings (Climate Emergency Programme Director) (virtual), Linda Hunting (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning, and Housing), Anthony Jones (Head of Housing Sustainability - Growth, Planning and Housing), Jim Patterson (Divisional Head of Sustainability and Major Works) (virtual), Chris Spicer (Strategic Programme Manager – PDHU), and Neil Whiteman (Head of Housing).

#### 1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to membership.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 The Committee noted there were no declarations of interest.

#### 3. MINUTES

3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting held on 8 February 2023.

3.2 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting held on 2 March 2023.

#### RESOLVED:

3.3 That the minutes of the Call-In meeting held on 8 February 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

3.4 That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

#### **4. PORTFLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES**

4.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Liza Begum, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, on priorities for the portfolio and any updates that have arisen. The Cabinet Member responded to questions on the following topics:

- The management of mould and condensation in Council-owned properties and how complex and historic cases are being managed and prioritised, including, public awareness and what the Council is doing to monitor seasonal issues.
- The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- The 215 open cases of anti-social behaviour, including 25 open cases in Pimlico, and reporting of anti-social behaviour in reference to specific estates and wards.
- Anti-social behaviour cases and how legal proceedings are being carried out by the Council, including, how this may affect evictions, possessions, injunctions, future applications for re-housing and homelessness, and the actions being taken by the Council toward residents where anti-social behaviour has been an issue.
- Ombudsmen cases, including, cases that have involved vulnerable residents and what steps the Council are putting in place to work with residents.
- The details and lead times of the reporting provided to the Committee across housing repairs, management of damp and condensation, and anti-social behaviour.
- The Rental Support Fund and the possible band of support available for individual tenants, who is targeted for this fund and whether it covers residents who move into places such as retirement homes. The Council estimates this is in the region of 4000 residents. It was further discussed whether there would be an opportunity for the Council to use this fund for rental payment for residents, should the fund be under-subscribed, and the scope for residents to apply for this assistance over the four-year rolling fund, after the first round.
- The Relief Duty Changes, households included on the Housing Register, and how that may affect residents housing situation when applicable residents come off the register if they are placed in accommodation privately due to a reassessment, and that some residents will be housed outside of the borough. It was noted the Council have received 158 registrations for Relief Duty to date.
- The review of the Allocations Scheme by the Council.
- The repair service update, including, the breakdown of the type of repair requested and the figures presented, the figures relating to repair jobs that were a temporary measure and needed to be revisited or completed, and how these repeat jobs are being managed by the Council.

- The Bruckner Street Community Office becoming a Housing Drop-In Centre, whether there is expected to be a knock-on effect of this, and whether there are plans to open further estate offices in the south of Westminster.
- Whether there will be any financial assistance for leaseholders in Westminster in the future, including a discussion about the current repayment plan which helps them to manage payments, more flexibility with service charges and rents, and ways in which the Council can support leaseholders who incur the same types of financial stresses as residents in rented accommodation.
- Many residents, including leaseholders, do not understand how to operate in a financially responsible way in the newer properties with all electric systems. It was noted by the Committee there is a need for more help and guidance to residents who don't understand the energy systems.

### **ACTIONS:**

1. That the details in the reports covering anti-social behaviour be broken down further to include wards or specific estates to give Members a clearer understanding of the figures.
2. That Members be updated on the Relief Duty Households and the effects on the housing register regarding allocations if a resident is housed privately.
3. Rental Support Fund and specific information around leaseholders and their inclusion in that fund or support for them, including information on the funds that had been paid out.
4. That the figures for the total number and type of repairs in reports are checked further prior to being presented to the Committee and include repair jobs that were temporary and required further work.
5. That information about Bruckner Street becoming a Housing Services drop-in office will expect a knock-on effect as a result of this.
6. That information about how the Council is proceeding with anti-social behaviour cases is provided to the Committee, to include, how this may affect evictions and further applications for housing and what actions the Council is taking in light of these factors.
7. That further information about No Mo May and surrounding initiatives to improve community cohesion be provided to the Committee.
8. That more detailed data and a longer lead time be provided in the Member reports to the Committee, such as, housing repairs, anti-social behaviour, and mould and damp.
9. That further information be provided about how many residents would receive support of the Rental Support Fund and within what band of support.

## **5. PORTFOLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE ACTION, REGENERATION AND RENTERS**

5.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Matt Noble, Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters, on priorities for the portfolio and any updates that have arisen. The Cabinet Member responded to questions on the following topics:

- How the organisations that sign up to the Sustainable City Charter are held to account by the Council and how they report to the Council.
- The Westminster Green Investment Bond, the profile of the 480 investors, the size of the investments made, and whether there is scope for the Council to offer another round of Green Bond funding and how that may be structured and allocated to future capital projects, including decarbonisation projects.
- The Climate Assembly, the stratification process for selecting people and the 50 participants being representative of the borough, the Council's climate action goals, the information provided to participants, and the focus of the assembly in areas where residents have a particular stake in.
- Biodiversity and the Wild West End Partnership focussing on green infrastructure exists and where there are opportunities for further green spaces across the City, particularly in more built up areas to include, roof-top and vertical greening projects and working with partners across Westminster and how the initiative can benefit smaller community initiatives and to what extent local residents have input into ideas.
- The goal to increase the number of residents taking appointments for the Green Doctors (GD), what the Council is doing to promote this, and the number of additional appointments (400) that have been purchased by the Council, including, how the Council is monitoring the service the GD provides and whether the assistance to residents is effective, efficient and valid, the cost of the service (circa £40,000) and the information and advice it provides residents. That residents are being encouraged to switch to smart meters by the GD and the potential changes that can be made to a pre-payment smart meter thereafter, how a resident could potentially be without energy if they were unable to credit the meter in advance, and the information that is required for residents in advance.
- The amount of funds available in the Carbon Offset Fund and whether there is scope for grants to be allocated to other green investment projects across the Council.
- The restrictions to the Climate Bond Fund and how this funding must be allocated to projects that are Council capital projects that have returns.
- The Greening Westminster programme, support for community groups, and encouraging applications for small initiatives, how the Council is monitoring applications and considering new ideas to ensure that projects are evenly distributed across local areas, currently and in the future.
- Westminster Builds and the registered provider status and how this Committee should be considering the housing aspect of this and not the investment and financial aspects, as recommended by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group.
- The charity Westminster Community Homes (WCH), how many properties they own (450), and how they became a registered provider of housing to the

Council, including, what aspects of housing the Council is commissioned to manage on behalf of WCH, and how Councillors and residents refer issues.

## **ACTIONS:**

1. Officers to supply data on the investors of the Westminster Green Investment Bond, to include, the organisations involved and whether these are based in or outside of the borough to the Committee.
2. Officers to supply information about the cost of the Green Doctors (circa £40,000) to include, how the cost is calculated, how the Council measures whether the assistance to residents is effective, and what types of information and advice are provided to residents to the Committee.

## **6. THE PIMLICO DISTRICT HEATING UNDERTAKING (PDHU) DECARBONISATION AND RENEWAL – STRATEGIC OUTLINE CASE**

- 6.1 The Chair welcomed Chris Spicer (Strategic Programme Manager - PDHU) and Anthony Jones (Head of Housing Sustainability - Growth, Planning and Housing) to introduce the report on the Pimlico District Heating Undertaking (PDHU) Decarbonisation and Renewal – Strategic Outline Case and provide an overview of the report. The PDHU Strategic Programme Manager and the Head of Housing Sustainability responded to questions on the following topics:
  - The impact of the project and how it will affect residents' bills.
  - The number of homes (3300, including 3 estates) and 50 commercial properties, that the PDHU services.
  - That the PDHU accounts for 31% of the Council's annual carbon emissions, making the operating and running of the network an asset.
  - That it is an ageing asset (being over 50 years old) and therefore there are significant running costs which are increasing and have impact on residents.
  - Modernisation of the network and improving reliability for residents.
  - Carbon emissions savings to 2030.
  - The costs of the project, including the risks and feasibility of the options presented.
  - The primary options investigated in the outline business case to achieve the Council's goals, including, retaining the full network and replacing the boilers and installing a supplement River-Source Heat Pump to support the boilers and retaining the gas boilers to provide peak demand, or installing electric boilers to replace the gas, removing Lillington and Longmoore Estates from the network and installing a self-contained energy source for those residents and retain the rest of the network and use a River-Source Heat Pump system with electric or gas boilers for heat demand, and splitting the network into three separate networks to allow more control and ability to manage the interference caused by the works in stages, as well as cost implications.
  - The upgrade of the entire network pipe system, which presents as the largest costs of the project, and the risk of higher running costs if this is not carried out.

- The heat pump solution, which has been the most technically and financially viable option in the planning to date, the benefit of this solution producing more energy than it uses, and how this option contrasts to an air source pump system.
- Resident engagement and the plans for the resident groups, the high levels of disruption for residents in dwellings and communal areas, and how that will be prioritised in the plans.
- The operational and capital costs, and the energy costs for running the system.
- Funding of the project, including possible grant funding, a sinking fund, and the majority of the costs incurred around the pipe work renewal that would need to be met by a loan, including the impact this will have on residents service charges year on year.
- Any risks presented in the plans and working with stakeholders, including heritage stakeholders and how the risks are being mitigated.
- The procurement of professional services such as architects and engineers and the level of expertise required.
- The South Westminster Area Network (SWAN) and future options, including the costs and continuing as part of the network and the implications for the PDHU, possible available funding contributions, and the required support from central Government and the Greater London Authority (GLA).
- Legislation about communal heating and the metering for individual households and how that may impact the project.
- The plans for resident consultation and the ratio of leaseholders and tenants.
- Costs versus the carbon reduction, including the costs to residents.
- The potential effect to leaseholders, how they have been advised when they have purchased a property under the PDHU system, potential risks involved to possible legal challenges, Compulsory Purchase Settlements (CPO) applications, decanting, and the formal legal process for consultation with leaseholders.
- The long-term nature of the plans and how technology may change prior to completion.
- The risks highlighted in the plans for the River-Source Heat Pumps.
- The extent to which the intended plans would increase leaseholders' property value and the improvements projected with items such as repairs, leaseholder control, and heating performance.

## **ACTIONS**

1. Officers to supply to the Committee and make available to other Members of the Council, the PowerPoint presentation from the meeting.

## **7. 2022/2023 WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 The Chair invited the Policy and Scrutiny Advisor to introduce the Committee to the draft Work Programme for the 2023/24 municipal year.
- 7.2 The Policy and Scrutiny Advisor explained the key changes to the format of the Work Programme document and outlined the priorities, rationale and

format for the items, as well as the timing.

7.3 The Committee approved the draft Work Programme for the next municipal year.

7.4 The following points regarding the Work Programme were noted by the Committee.

- The possibility of Westminster Builds coming to scrutiny following a decision being taken in May 2023.
- Housing Repairs Improvement and the more detailed data and information that is required when it is next presented at Committee in April 2024, in particular, repeat visits to properties. It was further agreed this report to be brought to the Committee at least once per municipal year and a request for this item to be moved to an earlier round in 2023/24.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

8.1 The Committee expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Chair for her guidance throughout this municipal year.

## **9. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

9.1 The meeting ended at 8.58 pm.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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