



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 **Tuesday 20th June, 2023**, Rooms 18.08, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Concia Albert (Chair), Gillian Arrindell, Robert Eagleton, David Harvey, Elizabeth Hitchcock, and Ed Pitt Ford.

Also Present: Councillor Matt Noble (Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters), Councillor Maggie Carman (Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning, and Housing), Neil Whiteman (Director of Housing), Dr. Amy Jones (Director of Environment), Damian Hemmings (Head of Climate Emergency), Anthony Jones (Head of Housing Sustainability - Growth, Planning and Housing), Linda Hunting (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Nikki Costain (Cabinet Portfolio Advisor for Councillor Matt Noble) and Nicholas Porter-Ch'ng (Cabinet Portfolio Advisor for Councillor Liza Begum).

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

- 1.1 Nominations for the post of Chair were invited.
- 1.2 One nomination was received by Councillor Arrindell.
- 1.3 This nomination was seconded by Councillor Eagleton.
- 1.4 There were no further nominations.
- 1.5 **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Albert be appointed as Chair of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

2 MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 The Committee received apologies from Councillor Sanquest.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 The Committee noted there were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES

4.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting held on 19 April 2023.

RESOLVED:

4.2 That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

5 PORTFOLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

5.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Maggie Carman (Deputy 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:

- Rough sleeping and why particular areas have a high street count, the involvement of BID's (Business Improvement District), including the challenges with rough sleepers being transitional and the data around rough sleeping.
- The Rental Support Allowance and how much funding has been allocated, including, the average payments per household, the criteria for an application and the advice support available for residents, the purpose of the fund, the length of time the funding will continue and the available financial support for leaseholders, and how Westminster's scheme has been reviewed in line with other Council's.
- Housing performance data updates for the Committee.
- How Westminster housing can assist the mental health hospitals with accommodation, housing residents that are mental health patients, and what funding is available for the mental health housing provision, including those residents that are homeless whilst suffering from mental health conditions.
- ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) cases and how data is captured, how many are investigated and resolved, and how the research is obtained.
- Housing repairs and resources to ensure work is completed and residents having the ability to sign off on repairs and the current pilot scheme on this initiative.
- The Corporate Housing Improvement Programme.
- Fire safety in Westminster and the Council's relationship with the Fire Brigade, with leaseholders, and residents in maintaining and improving fire safety standards.
- Housing for vulnerable residents and their families and how suitability checks and inspections are carried out of properties by the Council and by housing providers, including temporary accommodation, and the involvement of the allocations team.
- Relief duty households and how they are housed.

- Community Thursdays, the timing of the sessions, and what has been the most effective to capture resident engagement.

ACTIONS:

1. That housing performance data will be supplied to the Committee.
2. That the Committee be updated on information about the Council's fire safety standards and what is being done to support residents in fire safety.
3. That information about how the data for ASB cases is obtained be provided for the Committee.
4. That information about the possibility of extending the pilot on Supporting Vulnerable Residents and their families with housing needs be supplied to the Committee.
5. That the breakdown of rough sleepers for each ward and information about the accommodation that is offered to rough sleepers be provided to the Committee.
6. That information about the Rental Support Fund, how it is promoted, and what support is offered leaseholders be provided to the Committee.
7. That information about Relief Duty Households and how many are housed privately, including the effect this has on the housing register be supplied to the Committee.

6 PORTFOLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE ACTION, REGENERATION AND RENTERS

- 6.1 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:

- The Climate Assembly and Climate Assembly Advisory Group, including the constitution of the advisory group, their recommendations, how these are tested and taken forward, and how the Assembly will make informed plans.
- The plans to deliver the Climate Emergency Action Plan, further plans to include resident views and engagement - including overcoming any barriers, and the ongoing consultation and recommendations.
- The Balmoral and Darwin House development, how decisions have been made, and how funding has been achieved from the GLA (Greater London Authority).
- The overall predicted estimated costs of retrofitting properties towards net zero, the decarbonisation energy network projects that have been earmarked, larger investment projects such as the (PDHU) Pimlico District Heating Unit,

and advances in technology that may increase additional funding opportunities for the Council.

- The extent to which solar energy is being incorporated as part of the retrofitting and climate change plans across Westminster, how this is funded and how this is prioritised.
- The Renters Reform Bill 2023, how this may affect tenants and issues that may be more prevalent in Westminster.
- The extent of the increases for private rented accommodation, the difference between the costs of renting and the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), how many tenants of private rented sector properties would work and not be entitled to Discretionary Payments, as issues around rough sleepers who don't qualify for assistance with accommodation are advised to register for private accommodation.
- How the challenges of retrofitting properties with landowners, such as disruption and loss of space, has and will be communicated to residents, including the benefits of the show home and further education initiatives for residents.
- How the energy crisis has increased the interest in retrofitting across Westminster.
- The timeline of the projects that will be funded by the Green Bond.
- The Ebury Bridge development and the number of social tenant residents that are now confirmed as returning in Phase 1.

ACTIONS:

1. Information on the specific projects that have been shortlisted for the Green Bond funding and the details of the expected timeline for these to commence / conclude to be provided to the Committee.
2. That information about how many of the total number of social rent properties in Phase 1 at Ebury Bridge are being taken up by returning residents to be provided to the Committee.
3. That the Committee be kept updated on the Council's net zero approach and offsetting measures.
4. That the Committee be informed of the total estimated cost of the Council's plans for hitting net zero.

7 RETROFITTING IN WESTMINSTER

- 7.1 The Chair welcomed Dr. Amy Jones (Director of Environment), and Damian Hemmings (Head of Climate Emergency) to introduce the report on the Council's activities to retrofit buildings across Westminster, a key priority of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and provide an overview of the report. The Director of Environment and the Head of Climate Emergency responded to questions on the following topics:

- The built environment and emissions that have informed upgrading the Council's properties and decarbonising properties.
- The stakeholders involved and the initiatives being introduced to progress the Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- Working with residents to support them in understanding and reducing their energy demands and improving their properties.
- The Retrofit Task Force and the challenges of the different types of properties in Westminster.
- Consultation with the National Grid around capacity and how the Council delivers the Local Energy Plan in line with the needs of Westminster and the challenges and changes to energy usage.
- The net zero approach and off-setting measures to drive down emissions.
- Retrofitting across the corporate estate.
- The Climate Programme that exists across London Council's and how off-setting may be considered collectively.
- The Climate Emergency Action Plan and the Council's approach to off-setting, including mitigation.
- Networking and drawing on expertise outside of the Council to inform and future-proof the Climate Plan, including Universities, organisations and consultants.
- The MEE's (Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard) pilot and the Council's powers to monitor and enforce residents to adhere to achieving the minimum standard in properties.
- The Retrofit First initiative and assessments for properties to be demolished over retrofitting, carbon offset payments as part of the planning applications to achieve net zero, and incentivising retrofit with residents.
- The MEE's Plus Pilot Scheme and what is being done to encourage take-up of the scheme, ability to expand the scheme, and how this will be tracked and monitored.
- The progress of the Climate Action Programme since October 2022 and the Yearly Emissions Report that will be published in June 2023.

ACTIONS:

1. That further information will be provided to the Committee about the Council's ability to enforce the minimum standards set out in the MEE's pilot.

8 COUNCIL OWNED HOUSING STOCK RETROFITTING PLANS

- 8.1 The Chair welcomed Anthony Jones (Head of Housing Sustainability - Growth, Planning and Housing) to introduce the report on the progress the Council has made retrofitting its housing stock in order to meet its objective to a Net Zero standard by 2040, and provide an overview of the report. The Head of Sustainability responded to questions on the following topics:

- Changes in technology and pilot schemes to inform future plans, including possible grant funding.
- Fabric improvements to properties and the challenges with changing fully to electrification in properties.

- Working with other councils to share ideas and solutions for the skill set shortages.
- Responses from resident surveys and how residents have engaged with the Council to act as champions to encourage other residents towards retrofitting.
- The barriers to retrofitting uptake communicated from residents such as loss of space in properties and timing of the completion of works to a high standard.
- The challenges with heat pump installation and the possible alternatives such as storage and infra-red heating systems and how these systems compare in terms of disruption, cost, and space, including compatibility with SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) for installation.
- The challenges with retrofitting in listed buildings.
- Housing Associations and how they can be encouraged and supported towards retrofitting.
- The Retrofit Show Home and how this has encouraged retrofitting across Westminster and showcased the work the Council is doing.
- The trade skills that will be required to carry out the Council's plans and how the Council will plan to acquire the necessary skill sets, including promotion with WAES (Westminster Adult Education Service) to plan for the gaps in the market and working with organisations such as MCS (The Microgeneration Certification Scheme) to plan for ways to train people in the roles that will be required in teams as retrofitting schemes progress.
- How the Council is planning for a future electricity crisis.
- Relying on outside expertise and consultancy to inform the Council's plans.
- Void properties and the plans to retrofit these prior to them being tenanted, including prioritising properties below EPC C rating, and how this is being tracked to 2040.
- The minimum EPC standard across housing stock that is the target for the Council and retrofitting to the MEE's minimum standard.

9 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

9.1 The Chair invited the Policy and Scrutiny Advisor to introduce the Committee to the Work Programme and provide an overview and updates.

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

- Possible site visits to the Retrofit Show Home.
- That the Green Bonds and Community Energy Projects item scheduled for July Committee will now be provided as a written update for Members between September and December 2023 and a further briefing session held for Members, if required.
- The Committee Action Tracker is progressing well and is up to date.
- Alternative housing providers and the role the Council plays with providing accommodation to our residents through these providers, as a possible item for the 2023/ 24 Work Programme.
- The Corporate Housing Improvement Programme – the Committee to review the recommendations made.

9.3 The Committee agreed that future potential items for 2023/24 would be considered by the Committee prior to the next Committee meeting.

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 The Committee acknowledged possible changes to the scrutiny process following the recent Scrutiny Review of Westminster Council.

10.2 The Committee discussed and agreed the format and purpose for the forthcoming pre-meeting to be held at 6.00 pm, 19 July.

ACTIONS:

1. Policy and Scrutiny Advisor to arrange a pre-meeting and re-schedule the start time of the forthcoming Committee to 6.45 pm.

11 TERMINATION OF MEETING

11.1 The meeting ended at 8.46 pm.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____