



City of Westminster

# Cabinet

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| <b>Meeting:</b>            | Cabinet  |
| <b>Date:</b>               | 15 May 2023  |
| <b>Classification:</b>     | General Release  |
| <b>Title:</b>              | Council Response to the Future of Westminster Commission's Housing Review  |
| <b>Wards Affected:</b>     | All  |
| <b>Fairer Westminster:</b> | Fairer Housing – Ensuring the housing needs of our residents are met by improving our housing services.  |
| <b>Key Decision:</b>       | Non-key.   |
| <b>Financial Summary:</b>  | There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The recommendations in Appendix A will be subject to the standard budget cycle, i.e. Medium Term Financial Plan, HRA Business Planning and Capital Strategy. |
| <b>Report of:</b>          | Debbie Jackson, Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing   |

## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 On 11 July 2022, Cabinet agreed to implement the Future of Westminster Commission (“the Commission”) with a scope to review and make recommendations on the delivery of key council services to help deliver a Fairer Westminster for residents.
- 1.2 The Future of Westminster Commission convened a core group and established four workstreams with additional Commission members (Housing, Economy & Employment, Energy & Green Transition, Fairness & Equality).
- 1.3 Within the Housing Review, three lines of enquiry were created for the Commission to advise on:
  - increasing the supply of genuinely affordable housing to meet housing need in the city;
  - advise on options for improving the way the Council responds to homelessness and housing need; and
  - the quality of services provided to the Council’s own tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.4 The Commission will report on the other three workstreams separately in the coming months and this will represent a conclusion of the Commission’s work.
- 1.5 **Appendix A** sets out the headline recommendations proposed by the Commission and outlines the Council’s responses to those recommendations.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the proposed responses to the Commission’s Housing Review headline recommendations (**Appendix A**) and instruct officers to integrate the resulting actions within the Housing Service and other relevant services’ work programmes.

## **3. Reasons for the Decision**

- 3.1 The Council commissioned a review of Housing Management, Housing Supply and Housing Homelessness & Need through the Future of Westminster Commission. Upon review of the Commission’s report, each of the headline recommendations have been considered individually (as outlined in **Appendix A**), with a view to accepting, rejecting, modifying or otherwise considering each. The proposed responses are put forward on the basis that they align with the strategic ambitions of the Council.

## **4.1 Background, including Policy Context**

- 4.1 Bringing together experts from Housing Associations, Housing Standards, Law, Civil Service and Academic Institutions, as well as a newly formed Residents

Panel to review existing work of the Council, the Housing Review covered some of Westminster's biggest challenges.

- 4.2 The Housing Review strand of the Commission was led by Steve Hilditch (*former Director of Policy Shelter; former Director of Housing at London Borough of Haringey*) as Chair, to deep dive into three areas of work:
- Housing Management
  - Housing Supply
  - Housing Homelessness & Need

#### Housing Management

- 4.3 The Housing Management Review utilised a Residents Panel comprising of 20 of the Council's own tenants and leaseholders who had volunteered to sit on a panel and who advised the Review.
- 4.4 The Panel primarily focused on improving responsive repairs and major works performance, local service delivery and responsiveness to residents, discussing solutions to better value for rent and service charge payers, and how the Council can deliver more effective engagement with tenants and leaseholders to give them more say over decisions that affect their homes and estates.

#### Housing Supply

- 4.5 The Housing Supply review sought to examine and analyse the factors that limit the Council's ability to deliver sufficient social and truly affordable housing in Westminster and to advise and make recommendations to the Council on strategy and measures to meet Westminster's housing needs.
- 4.6 As set out in the Commission's report, the Housing Supply work reviewed three key priorities for the Council; maximising the number of homes available at social rent, provision of intermediate housing (targeting mainly key workers at moderate incomes) and increasing the supply of good quality temporary accommodation to meet the Council's homelessness statutory duties.

#### Housing Homelessness & Need

- 4.7 The main purpose of the Housing Homelessness & Need review was to analyse and challenge the Council's current strategy to better meet housing needs and identify better ways to support residents who need a home. This review focused on four specific areas: prevention and decision-making, temporary accommodation, allocations, and rough-sleeping.

### **5. Review of Recommendations**

- 5.1 The Council welcomes the Commission's insight and appreciated the opportunity to explain and explore the challenges and opportunities for housing supply, management and homelessness, meanwhile receiving expert opinion on areas for improvement or change.

5.2 The Commission's report (delivered during April 2023) has been well received, with majority of the recommendations being agreed. The Council's response to the headline recommendations is set out in **Appendix A**.

5.3 It is anticipated that many of the resulting actions will now be taken forward by Cabinet Members and senior officers as part of existing and planned programmes of work, which will in turn be monitored and reported to Policy and Scrutiny and other committees as appropriate. Where there are initiatives requiring statutory consultation or formal decision making, these will require separate reporting to Cabinet, the relevant Cabinet Member or senior officer for approval.

## **6. Corporate Housing Improving Programme (CHIP)**

6.1 The Housing Review findings will help steer the change to be undertaken in delivering housing services in Westminster. As a next step we are now establishing a Corporate Housing Improvement Programme (CHIP) to support the drive and ambition of delivering the best possible service for our residents.

6.2 The programme will bring together leadership and support from across the Council, ensuring maximum collaboration and benefit from the expertise and resources of the wider Council, in delivering future housing services for our residents.

6.3 The CHIP will be working alongside the Director of Housing and other colleagues to lead the programme. The programme will be overseen by a Corporate Housing Improvement Board comprised of cross Council leadership, accountability, and support. The Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing will oversee this work.

6.4 As the CHIP gets underway it will be addressing three immediate priorities that align with the Commission's recommendations:

- prioritising communications with residents, which include continuous improvements with the call centre;
- implementing a proposed improvement plan for the Repairs Service as soon as possible and;
- developing an action plan to improve front line services particularly focused on Housing Needs.

## **7. Work Underway – Delivering the Fairer Westminster Strategy**

7.1 Upon receiving the Commission's recommendations it was noted that several key workstreams have already started or are due to start in 2023/2024 as a part of the delivery plan for the Fairer Westminster Strategy and business-as-usual improvement work of the Housing Service.

7.2 Programmes of work already underway or set to begin are outlined below in accordance with the three Review Reports.

## Housing Management

- 7.3 The value of the contributions from the Resident's Panel giving their first-hand experience in engaging with the service should be noted. This allowed the Council to gain holistic insight into both perceptions and impacts of the Housing Service. Noting the Commission's recommendation to re-appoint the panel for the remainder of the financial year, officers have already begun discussing this with the panel following receipt of the Commission's report and pending the decision of Cabinet.
- 7.4 Taking on feedback from residents on how housing officers and services can be more accessible to the community, the Council is working to increase frontline housing officers by one third and give our tenants better face-to-face contact with our housing staff by increasing the locations our officers can work from across the city. To this end, a new service centre will be operational from Bruckner Street on the Mozart Estate in May 2023. Further locations will be established through the cross-Council Community Hubs Programme where Housing Services will have a prominent presence.
- 7.5 The creation and adoption of two separate Charters focused on Repairs and Leaseholders continues at pace, in line with Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan targets for 23/24.

## Housing Supply

- 7.6 Through the adoption of the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy, the Council has been working to maximise affordable units through our Regeneration Programme. As a result of the policy change, the Council has undergone a robust formal planning process to 'flip' at least 160 new homes originally designated as private rent to Council housing for social rent, to support affordable housing in Westminster. This takes our total stock to at least 1,362 affordable units in the current development pipeline. This work is a key component of the Fairer Westminster Strategy and has already been integrated into the existing service delivery framework.
- 7.7 It should be noted that the City Plan review is also currently underway with formal consultation taking place in October / November 2022 and adoption anticipated in 2025, along with work on the forthcoming Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document looking to address issues such as the affordability of intermediate housing for new supply.

## Homelessness & Housing Need

- 7.8 As a key priority for the Council, commitments have already been made to improvements in this service area and the Council has been working closely with stakeholders to achieve this aim. Work is already underway to identify the best delivery route for the Housing Solutions Service in the future, which includes consideration of insourcing options for all or part of the service as part of the corporate Insourcing Programme approach. Officers are working to

ensure funding is in place to cope with additional service pressures as a result of any increases to homelessness in Westminster.

- 7.9 In supporting residents who reside in Temporary Accommodation (TA), the Council already has an inspection regime for Council-owned self-contained TA, with arrangements remaining under constant review.
- 7.10 To overhaul service delivery in this area and meet the needs of our residents, two key pieces of work are set to start in 23/24. A top priority will be to review the existing Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan in line with the current refresh set for 2024, and the full review of the Supply and Allocations Scheme is set to begin imminently.

## **8. Monitoring and Future Analysis**

- 8.1 For recommendations that fall within the remit of CHIP, progress will be monitored and managed through the CHIP governance. Recommendations that sit outside the scope of the CHIP will be taken forward through the respective services' business plans and through monitoring of the Council's Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan and other corporate delivery and reporting mechanisms.

## **9. Financial Implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The recommendations in Appendix A will be subject to the standard budget cycle, i.e. Medium Term Financial Plan, HRA Business Planning and Capital Strategy.

## **10. Legal and Equality Implications**

- 10.1 **Appendix A** contains a number of initiatives Cabinet is asked to approve, some of which will require adherence to statutory provisions in order to implement, to include statutory consultation.
- 10.2 Consideration will also be given to the requirement to undertake consultation and Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) to ensure the Council considers its Public Sector Equality Duty on an ongoing basis for each initiative.
- 10.3 Legal Services and other corporate services will be engaged at an early stage, as appropriate, as the mobilisation of recommendations are taken forward.

## **11. Carbon Impact**

- 11.1 There are no direct carbon implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Individual carbon assessments will be carried out as needed on a case-by-case basis as recommendations are adopted through new or existing programmes of work, in line with current organisational practices.

## 12. Consultation

- 12.1 Resident and Member consultation will be undertaken through the adoption of new and existing programmes of work in line with current organisational practices.

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

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## APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - Future of Westminster Commission Housing Review – Council Response to Headline Recommendations
- Appendix 2 - Future of Westminster Commission – Housing Review

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Future of Westminster Commission – report to Cabinet – 11 July 2022](#)