



City of Westminster

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

Date: 12 September 2023
Portfolio: Housing Services
The Report of: Councillor Liza Begum, Cabinet
Member for Housing Services
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The following report includes my priority and delivery progress to date:

1.0 Improving our housing services

1.1 Communications & Engagement

Engagement sessions with staff continue being undertaken including estate office visits, walkabouts, one-to-ones.

Hosted a meeting with the Residents Panel and Residents Associations chairs with the Housing Ombudsman in attendance and we are working with them on areas such as Major Works and Repairs

New website landing page for housing has gone live and all the housing content (apart from homelessness) has been reviewed and updated

Publicity of good news items includes:

- Videos with Repairs and Customer Services team members
- Reopening of Grosvenor Community Hall
- New council homes being built at Queens Park Court
- Ongoing promotion of the rent support fund

1.2 People & Culture

We have been working with staff to develop a new Housing Vision and Values. The new vision and values will underpin the way we and our partners interact with residents and deliver services.

We have been working on plans for a new Housing Induction, the first sessions of which will take place in November. We have engaged with Housing staff at the frontline forums to help design the new Induction.

Facilities management for the Housing Service Centres has moved to a new team within Corporate Property at the start of August. This means that we now have a dedicated resource for managing facilities.

A Housing Service Centre improvement plan is being developed setting out a range of improvements we will be making in our Housing Service centres including upgrades to carpets, furniture and IT. We have engaged with Housing staff to find out what upgrades they would like to see taking place in the Housing Service Centres.

We have been running a series of Frontline Forum meetings with Housing staff to brief staff about any changes within Housing and to seek feedback from staff about any changes they would like to see.

1.3 Resident Experience

At the centre of our improvement programme is the focus on resident experience. We know that many of our residents do not receive the service that is expected. Work is underway with our staff and partnering contractors to refresh our Vision and Values, and the resident experience is core to this. We are collaboratively changing the way we work, working together to be more responsive and empathetic. This includes rolling out joint training for all staff and contractors.

We have appointed a temporary Head of Resident Experience to coordinate a number of work streams. The aim is to provide a more personal and supportive approach for residents with more complex issues or those who are more vulnerable, with dedicated officers working closely with residents. This includes a focus on developing a culture of learning from feedback and complaints.

1.4 Repairs

The improvement to the repairs service is a key priority. A deep dive of the service has been undertaken and an improvement plan with senior oversight is in place to ensure progress is being made. We complete approximately 74,000 repair jobs each year with our 5 contractors. To date our primary focus has been on working on the responsive repairs delivered by our main contractor, Morgan Sindall, which accounts for 54% of all responsive jobs. This is the area in need of greatest improvement, and we are working closely together with a focus on providing a better repairs experience for our residents.

Focus on primary responsive repair contract

Daily review meetings are carried out with our main repairs contractor focusing on operational delivery, including clearing overdue repairs, management of damp and mould, process improvements and handling of complex repair casework. This is supported by weekly senior meetings to track progress and manage risks. A key focus is on the winter planning and the management of repairs for vulnerable residents.

The key areas of performance of this contract are summarised below:

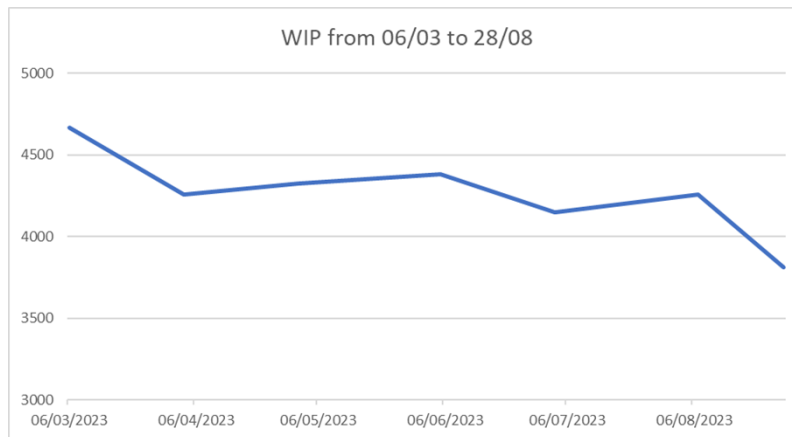
- Every repair job when reported is prioritised and is allocated a target date based on its priority category (see table below).
- In the last 12 months up to 31st August 2023, our responsive repairs contractor completed 40,092 jobs. Of those 33% were emergency, 26% were urgent and the remaining 41% were routine. Of these jobs 71% were complete in target, and this has improved to 78% from April to September this year. The number of repairs complete within target and average time taken for this financial year is shown in the table below.

Repair Job Completion Rate and Time to Complete (for both In Flat & Communal)

Repair priority	Target	April 23	May 23	June 23	July 23
Routine Repairs In Target	90%	85.2%	85.1%	86.2%	85.1%
Routine – Average Time to complete	28 (days)	48 days	42	37	32
Urgent Repairs In Target	90%	87.8%	87.5%	86.5%	86.0%
Urgent – Average Time to complete	3 days	13 days	11	13	14
Emergency Repairs In Target	98%	98.1%	99.3%	98.9%	98.9%
Emergency – Average Time to complete	Up to 1 day	0.1 days	0.2	0.1	0

- Emergency jobs are continuing to perform strongly. This continues to be a priority area to ensure that the immediate action needed is being taken.
- Urgent jobs are currently below target, and this is a focus of the improvement. This is driven by a number of factors including scheduling performance, service delays, follow on works being booked but original jobs not being cancelled and where there are complex jobs that require specialised materials & parts. Some of these reasons are administrative and we are working with the contractor to ensure we have more effective systems and processes in place.
- Routine jobs are also performing below target, however, there has been significant improvement in the average time to complete each job. This improvement has been driven by several factors including:
 - More operatives have been employed by the contractor to cover vacancies.
 - Productivity per operative has increased from 2.1 jobs per day to 3.8 which allows more jobs per day to be completed.
 - We have worked with repairs and Contact Centre staff to diagnose jobs with more accuracy to allow more to be classed as routine.
 - We have worked with the contractor to make more appointments available to be booked at the point of contact to reduce process delays.
 - Co-located the contractors 'planners' to improve communications and efficiency.

Live repairs jobs are managed as 'work in progress' or 'WIP' and are captured as a snapshot at the beginning of each week. This figure is approximately 10% of the total annual jobs completed at any one time. The WIP figure does not capture the jobs completed each week, only those awaiting completion every Monday. For example, there were approximately 130 jobs completed each day in August 2023 and 664 each week in the last 2 months. We have been tracking the WIP since March and the chart below shows the WIP volume was 4668 on 6th March and had reduced to 3811 on 28th August. This is a 19% reduction in the WIP. Our target is to have a WIP of approximately 3900 which is considered good practice.



This work and focus will now also be progressing across the other contracts and parts of the service.

Next steps

Whilst there has been improvement, there is significant work to do, including a focus on improving the resident experience and quality of repairs. We have heard extensive feedback from residents including through complaints, and this will continue to be central to our work. We have an upcoming session on the repair's improvement with the Resident Panel and Chairs of Resident Association and we will be establishing a resident working group to support us with this work.

The improvement programme is continuing and is bringing 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. The upcoming actions include:

- The roll out of Customer Empathy training across the service and with contractors
- Developing a suite of new policies and standards for the repairs service, including a new repairs charter setting out what residents can expect from the service; policies for damp and mould, window opening, void property management and an overarching repairs policy. These will be developed with residents.
- Reviewing our processes and ways of working for identifying and supporting vulnerable residents.
- Establishing resident sign off processes for both in flat and communal repairs.
- Ensuring follow on appointments are being booked by operatives with the resident in their home.
- Scoping the potential for a Westminster direct labour team focused on communal and estate-based repairs.
- Continuing to improve our systems, process and quality of data with a focus on improving resident experience

1.5 Mould and Condensation

The mould and damp team is fully recruited to, with a dedicated team of four operatives, surveyors, and an experienced repairs manager overseeing performance.

The number of damp and mould cases reported by both tenants and leaseholders has reduced over the summer period, and the number of open cases that we are actively managing has

also reduced. At the end of August, we had 154 open cases for tenants, compared with 520 cases at the end of April. This continues to be a priority for the service.

		April	May	June	July	August
Tenants	Live Cases	520	363	258	180	154
	Completed Cases	207	267	209	169	115
	New Cases Raised	150	110	104	91	85
Leaseholders	Live Cases	44	18	17	18	16
	Completed Cases	18	34	7	6	4
	New Cases Raised	8	8	6	7	2

1.6 Rent Support Fund

At the end of week 21 (27/08/2023), we have awarded £448,564.62 to 1,066 tenancies, with the average award in the sum of £420.79. We are working with communications on the next phase of the campaign. An overview of spend by ward is included below:

Ward	Sum of Award (£)	Number of Awards
Abbey Road	-£ 8,259.16	19
Bayswater	-£ 9,606.22	21
Church Street	-£ 33,731.10	84
Harrow Road	-£ 10,430.94	23
Knightsbridge and Belgravia	-£ 16,111.42	39
Lancaster Gate	-£ 7,369.96	20
Little Venice	-£ 17,642.55	43
Maida Vale	-£ 14,006.72	32
Marylebone	-£ 1,967.42	5
Out of Borough	-£ 1,621.88	5
Pimlico North	-£ 59,167.40	132
Pimlico South	-£ 51,790.24	120
Queen's Park	-£ 83,425.08	203
Regent's Park	-£ 10,002.46	25
St James's	-£ 4,947.80	12
Vincent Square	-£ 28,564.38	68
West End	-£ 7,581.86	20
Westbourne	-£ 82,338.03	195
Grand Total	-£ 448,564.62	1,066

1.7 Leasehold Conference

The fourth annual leasehold conference was held on the 22 July 2023 at Church Gardens resident's hall. This was the first-year post Covid where we were able to meet with our residents out on their estates. There was a very strong response to the conference with more than 150 leaseholders attending in person.

I opened the conference and the feedback received by residents about the conference via our online form was positive. Officers from across housing hosted stalls from 10am to 3pm from services such as ASB, the contact centre, HMO, housing, leasehold, repairs, resident

engagement, sustainability, health and safety, and the housing improvement programme. We also had external support from Westminster CAB, Green Doctors, and LEASE.

1.8 Resident Associations

- Recent joint meetings with the Chairs of local resident groups have been positive. Residents have valued the opportunity to hear from each other and to discuss how the resident engagement team can help them reflect the diversity of the community they represent.
- The Brunel Estate Sounding Board has reformed, and this group is making good progress. There have been a series of positive Sounding Board meetings with attendance from relevant Housing staff. The Sounding Board will be holding a Community Event on the Brunel Estate in September.
- This September, we are supporting resident events happening every weekend (Lisson Green, Carlton Vale, John Aird Court and Brunel).
- We are also helping new resident groups to get established, for example on Mozart and at West End Gate (Bond and Lawrence Mansions).
- We are providing targeted and tailored community engagement support to some of our existing groups that need assistance.
- The Housing Ombudsman is visiting the Lillington and Longmore Resident Association on 21st September to talk about his service. Our officers will be attending to listen to feedback and take forward the action needed.

1.9 Housing Service Centres

We are planning to increase the number of Housing Service Centres from 4 to 8. We opened the first new Housing Service Centre at Bruckner Street on the 5th of June. The next service centre to be opened will be situated at the Lillington and Longmore Estate on Charlwood Street which will open next month. In addition, we are planning to open a Housing Service Centre in Soho and we are working in partnership with the Communities Team to open a Community Hub in Bayswater.

1.10 PDHU Updates

A full-time engagement officer has been appointed for PDHU and started in the role in August. She has familiarised herself with the engagement plan prepared and has introduced herself to Resident associations. Resident associations have also been contracted and invited to a Workshop in October to shape the resident engagement required during and after the outline Business case is completed mid 2024 for long term investment in PDHU.

Both an experienced Project management consultancy and technical advice consultancy have been appointed (subject to call in) following a procurement exercise. This will provide the Council with the required expertise to take forward the right investment in PDHU for the Council and its residents connected to the district heating system.

1.11 HSS Updates and homelessness data

Rough Sleeping

Westminster Council delivers six street counts a year, bi-monthly. These counts give us additional understanding of the numbers and need on our street; However, they do not reflect the transient nature of rough sleeping or evidence the significant 'flow' of rough sleepers who move through Westminster in any period.

The last count took place on the 25th of July and 234 individuals were identified during the count. This saw a 9% increase from 215 individuals who were found in the May street count. We also saw an increase of those not known to services or where we were unable to establish details on the night, our frontline services have worked to match these contacts with data on CHAIN to confirm as many as possible.

During June and July 2023, we saw 168 referrals were made to accommodation pathways and 74 referrals were made to partner services, for support around Mental health, physical health, and adult social care interventions for those in need.

Homelessness

Homelessness continues to be an area of demand for Westminster, and across London, and we have experienced an increase in approaches to the Housing Solutions Service by 33.4% between April – July 2023 compared to the previous year, with 1613 approaches so far this year compared to 1209 last year.

We continue to see some success achieving the prevention of homelessness, currently 13% higher, averaging 57 per month between April – July 2023 compared to 50 per month the previous year.

However, we have seen a significant increase over the first 4 months of 2023/24 in main duty acceptances and have seen a 93% increase, with 241 cases being accepted compared to 125 at this point the previous year.

Temporary Accommodation

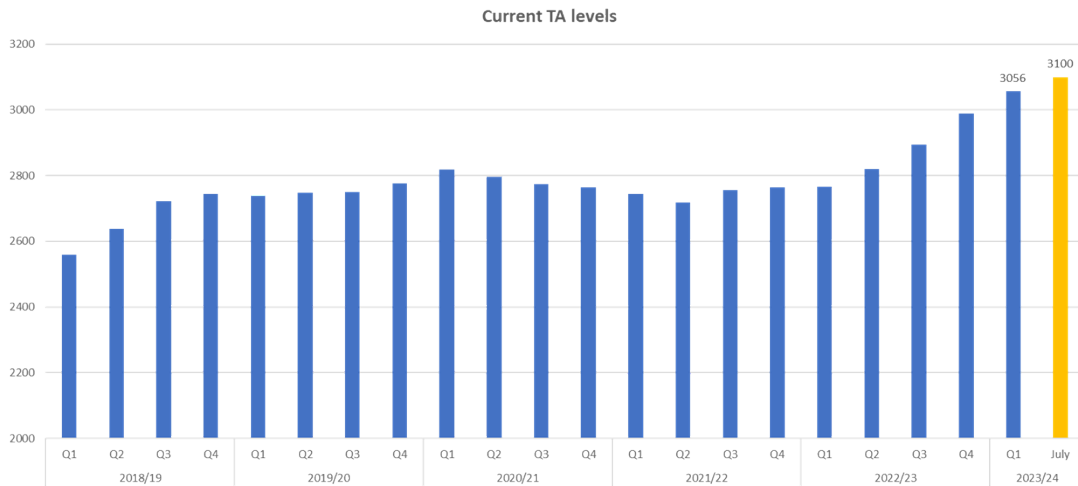
The Council procures both Temporary Accommodation (TA) and private rented sector in line with the Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy, which is updated annually.

Westminster currently manages a total temporary accommodation stock of over 3100 properties, over 1200 are in-borough and the majority of the remainder is in East and North London. Over 310 have been directly purchased by the Council for use as TA.

There are over 20 suppliers of TA to the Council. These vary from Registered Providers who lease properties directly from landlords and then to the Council and manage the properties, Registered Providers that own properties and use as TA, private property owners with a portfolio of various properties or own one block, or voluntary sector suppliers.

In accommodating single homeless households, we have a range of larger block provision within and outside the borough and these include self-contained blocks in Westminster such as Newman Street (81 units) and Frampton Street (46 units)

The market to secure accommodation for use for TA across London is very challenging reflecting the demands from households in housing need increasing the requirement for TA, together with reduced availability of properties to meet need; this has led to the use of some commercial hotels in particular circumstances where there was no other available accommodation specific to individual needs



Quality of Temporary Accommodation provision

The provision of Temporary Accommodation must be suitable for homeless households in terms of size, cost and location and is a statutory requirement for all local authorities. Units should comply with the TA Standards and all the TA Providers are required to meet these standards. Once a property becomes void as a re-let and let, the TA Provider must confirm that the property has full compliance with the standards and as part of the procedure, a certificate of supply is submitted to Housing Solution Service containing property details etc. including a gas electric certificate etc. Providers are also required to take photographs/ videos of vacant properties before letting.

The City Council and the Housing Solutions Services also have an inspection regime in place to regularly inspect TA in addition to the TA Providers own inspection programme. In addition, the 'Setting the Standards' (STS) programme started in September 2020 as a Pan-London approach to ensure TA, specifically Bed and Breakfast (B&B), Hostels, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO.) The project links together a dedicated central inspections team, with a purpose-built STS IT system to share data across the participating authorities. This is a focus of the improvement programme.