

## November Meeting Notes

<b>Date and Timing</b>	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup> November 2024, 6pm-8pm
<b>Location</b>	City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, SW1A 6QP&Online
<b>Chair</b>	Lareen Muhammed – Resident Chair
<b>Cllr Attendees</b>	Cllr Begum – Cabinet Member for Housing
<b>WCC &amp; Partner Presenters</b>	Sarah Warman – Strategic Director of Housing and Commercial Partnerships Zelda Wolfle – Director of Housing Services and Resident Engagement Jon Lock – Head of Housing Management Heather Clarke – Head of Housing Needs Paul Halpin – Head of Leasehold and Income Cecily Herdman - Principal Policy Officer Joanna Cain - Chief Executive Officer - Citizens Advice Westminster Representatives from the Regulator for Social Housing
<b>Residents who signed in</b>	36 (28 In-person/6 Online)

The meeting was opened by Resident Chair Lareen Mohammed. She welcomed attendees, acknowledging both in-person and online participants. She highlighted that the Forum is a space for collective discussions and set aside 30 minutes for individual queries at the end.

### Key Topics:

#### Welcome Update

- Cllr Begum announced the launch of the Housing Compact as a way of strengthening WCC’s relationship with Housing Associations, 11 have signed up, including Dolphin Living and Peabody.

- The purpose of the Housing Compact is to ensure that we have the platform to build good relationships with Housing Associations and to hold each other accountable and to work collaboratively with them.
- Booklets of the Compact were available at the meeting, more details can be found here [Westminster Housing Compact | Westminster City Council](#)
- Attendees watched the video from the launch of the Housing Compact.
- Cllr Begum reflected on seven productive Resident Forums since April 2024, with the next scheduled for January 2025. She thanked residents for their feedback and emphasised how important this is to improve housing services.
- Sarah Warman welcomed everyone to the Resident Forum and introduced the representatives from the Regulator of Social Housing, who were observing the meeting in person.
- Deborah, from the Regulator team explained that they are currently inspecting the Council. She summarised their approach, which to date has been reviewing documents and attending online meetings. She explained that they would also be coming to talk to tenants and colleagues, aiming to get a rounded picture of the services residents receive. Next year, they will be publishing a judgement and they'll be giving Westminster a grading.
- Sarah Warman explained how the Resident Forum started and has evolved in response to resident feedback.
  - Having smaller groups and smaller tables to enable better discussions
  - More opportunities for questions
- Jon Lock talked about the efforts to address anti-social behaviour (ASB) and highlighted Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness week, through local and city-wide outreach activities across the council jointly provided with the Public Protection and Licensing team and the police.
- Sarah Warman shared an update from the Resident Panel that took place a week ago, which is a formal Resident scrutiny forum. Two items discussed:
  - How we share performance information with the residents. As a part of that there was a discussion about our satisfaction surveys, about how easy and understandable they are.
  - Update on recruitment for the Resident Panel.
- Sarah Warman explained the emergency response called SWEP where we provide support to people sleeping rough in Westminster

- She also spoke about WCC's current repairs contracts which is due to expire in 2027, Sarah explained that we want to ensure that the residents are in the centre of the decision for new contracts and there will be lots of opportunities coming up for residents to have their say.

#### **Actions:**

- Provide ongoing communication and updates about the Housing Compact and its impact.
- Ensure that the work of the Resident Panel is more visible to other residents.
- Promote the opportunity for residents to apply to join the Resident Panel and other engagement opportunities that are available.

#### **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy**

- Heather Clarke presented on the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, followed by a Q&A session
- She explained that the strategy focuses on early prevention but also recognises that there will be crisis prevention required as well. Settlement plans as a part of this strategy will focus on people's needs and support needed.
- As a response to a question from a Resident about neurodivergence, Heather assured attendees that it is in the strategy and something we are learning about and trying to improve.

#### **Cost of Living**

- Zelda talked about the cost-of-living and the range of support available for residents in the borough. She emphasized the importance of gathering tenant vulnerability data through The Getting to Know You tenant census.
- Cecily Herdman explained the cost-of-living support hub and the different kinds of support available. <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support>
- Paul Halpin talked about our work with Citizen Advice and Shelter targeting areas with most need.

- One of the biggest initiatives is the Rent Support fund. The Rent Support fund aims to fund the difference in rent from the rent increase for those tenants in financial difficulty
- Joanna Cain of Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) explained their services and gave some examples of cases they had dealt with.  
<https://www.westminstercab.org.uk/advice/online-enquiry/>

### **Breakout Session**

Attendees engaged in group discussions to share feedback on:

1. What they thought about what they just heard and if they were aware of the support available.
2. If they thought there is more WCC can do to promote the offer to residents.

The feedback, suggestions and questions raised by Residents during the group discussion were recorded (see Appendix).

### **Individual Issues**

For the last 30 minutes of the meeting residents were able to discuss their individual issues with WCC staff members in the room. WCC staff in the room included the Strategic Director of Housing and Commercial Partnerships, Director of Housing Services and Resident Engagement, Head of Leasehold and Income Services, Head of Resident Experience, Head of Operations (Repairs), Head of Housing Management, Chief Surveyor, Chief of Repairs, Resident Engagement and Advocacy Manager, and Resident Engagement Manager.

Residents online were provided with an individual issues form which they were able to fill in to have their issue allocated to the relevant people/department for a quick response.

### **Action Summary**

These actions will be updated at the Resident Panel and we will bring back to a future Resident Forum.

**Resident Engagement Team**

- To follow up on and allocate the individual issues raised in the in the online form or recorded during group conversations to relevant colleagues.
- To produce and share a record of the output from the group activities (attached).
- To review feedback from residents and colleagues and discuss that with the Resident Panel to continue refining the way we deliver Resident Forum meetings.
- To ensure that the work of the Resident Panel is more visible to other residents.
- To promote the opportunity for residents to apply to join the Resident Panel and other engagement opportunities that are available.

**Westminster City Council**

- To review the feedback from the Resident Forum and report back on the impact it has had.
- To follow up on individual issues raised in the room with individual officers or via the online form during the last 30 minutes of the session.
- To provide ongoing communication and updates about the Housing Compact.