

Date of Full Council meeting	Question	Response
Wednesday 15 November 2023	What strategies are you putting in place for maladministration and injustice within the Housing service?	<p>The Cabinet Member for Housing Services acknowledged that for too long the housing services residents have been receiving have not been as good as they need to be. She advised that in June this year the Council made some structural changes to establish a Housing and Commercial Partnerships Directorate to focus resource and attention on Housing Services to support long-term improvement and change. The recent decisions from the Housing Ombudsman have been regrettable, the Council never wanted to be in a position where it has been found to have failed residents to such an extreme degree and the Cabinet Member apologised to all residents who have had to seek a remedy through the Ombudsman. The lessons the Council have learnt from the Ombudsman findings are directly informing service improvements including how it identifies, records and tailors the service to support vulnerable housing residents. The Council is also working to refocus the complaints procedure to ensure that the resident experience is at the centre of the process, ensuring timely, high-quality responses that get the outcome right first time and build-in lessons learnt to make sure there is a focus on sustained service improvement. In the coming months the Council will be finalising the Housing Management compensation policy, so that it is more transparent with residents about how compensation is calculated and offered when it has got things wrong. While the Council has a long way to go until the housing service fully matches the aspirations it has for it, the Cabinet Member hoped all she highlighted in the response reassured the resident that the Council is working hard to deliver change for residents.</p>
Wednesday 15 November 2023	I understand Buckingham Gate and surrounding areas are designated as Conservation areas. Could you tell me how and why houses at end of Castle Lane were allowed to ruin this blocks of houses with magnificent architecture by building another level on the original roof? It has made them very unsightly and not in keeping with the area. It is so sad that tourists are always taking pictures to put on social media.	<p>This is a Notting Hill Genesis development to refurbish and extend four residential blocks on Castle Lane to provide 88 flats for affordable rent or shared ownership; 11 of the flats will be delivered by adding an extra storey. The planning permission was given ten years ago.</p> <p>The Castle Lane blocks were originally built in the 1880s to house workers at the Stag Brewery. They are in the Birdcage Walk Conservation Area and are quite attractive. They are identified as buildings of merit which contribute positively to the conservation area. Before the renovations began, the roofs were flat and cluttered with a collection of unsightly stair enclosures and tank rooms. In contrast, the new roofs will include 11 affordable flats and support a large array of solar panels contributing to a sustainable energy supply to the site.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member stated that he appreciated that opinions differ on the design of the extensions which can be quite jarring from certain viewpoints. But he was not here to defend the choice and there is nothing to be done at this late stage. However, he did say that the buildings are not finished. Contractors still need to add the cladding in many places and extend the chimneys above the new roofline. The developers have informed him that these will ensure the extensions appear as integral parts of the building composition and provide a seemly termination to the buildings at roof level.</p> <p>In summary, the Council's current design team believes that, when completed, these new flats will not harm the conservation area. Not everyone is going to agree but it is important to remember that the project does bring the refurbishment of the existing flats, provision of 11 new ones and the solar panels.</p>

Wednesday 15 November 2023	How does the council expect leaseholders to pay these high bills for major works although we get payment plans I thought that the council was meant to cap what leaseholders were charged?	<p>The Cabinet Member for Housing Services stated that she understood that the current cost of some of the Council's major works programme are substantial and that many leaseholders are worried about their ability to afford these. Many of the projects underway or due start over the next couple of years have been impacted by issues out of the Council's direct control, such as the cost of raw materials or labour costs. The Council have worked to mitigate this as much as possible, looking where possible to postpone or reduce the scope of the works currently planned, this of course comes with the caveat that there is no guarantee that costs will be lower when those works finally happen. In certain circumstances costs to leaseholders are capped, for example some works around fire safety are for the Council to bear, regardless of whether the works are carried out to tenanted or leasehold properties, similarly where the Council is in receipt of government funding to carry out a set of works a cap would be imposed. However, this does not apply to the majority of our major works projects. The Council does offer a wide range of payment options to help leaseholders manage the cost of major works and are looking at what else it can do to support leaseholders. The Cabinet Member noted that the resident would have heard her say in response to an earlier question that the Council is focusing a huge amount of resource and attention towards Housing to help improve the service it delivers for residents. This includes looking at how it can deliver major works differently and it will engage directly with residents on this. The Cabinet Member encouraged the resident to speak with the leaseholder services team if they were worried about their circumstances.</p>
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<p>Wednesday 15 November 2023</p>	<p>What measures is the Council taking to monitor and enforce the new dedicated E-bike and E-scooter parking bays, including whether the E-bike companies are providing information and data on their geofencing enforcement and fines levied on incorrect use, and whether action is being taken to suspend or modify parking bays where persistent anti-social parking is still occurring?</p>	<p>The Council is trialling a network of parking bays for hired e-bikes across Westminster. This is in response to resident and visitor complaints about dockless e-bikes being left on the pavement, potentially endangering pedestrian safety.</p> <p>Despite lobbying the Government and its offices to regulate e-bikes and e-scooters in London, it is disappointing that it was not included in the recent King's Speech. This market remains unregulated and leaves the Council with very limited powers when it comes to managing dockless bikes in the city and enforcing against problem operators. The Council will continue to engage with the three current operators in Westminster, however, the wider issues of bikes on the streets and heightened risks to pedestrians remains due to a lack of appropriate legislation.</p> <p>Phase 1, which covered the central areas, launched in October. Phase 2 of the network launched on Tuesday 14 November meaning the entire borough is now subject to mandatory parking rules in designated locations. Whilst the Council hope to reach as high a level of compliance as possible, it understands that some users may choose to abandon their rides or park outside of one of the designated parking locations. Operators have been issuing warnings and fines to users who continually break the rules in Westminster. To date, more than 3,000 warnings have been issued by operators to users parking non-compliantly in the borough, and more than 200 fines have been issued.</p> <p>Clear pressure points across the network have been identified which the Council is aware of and it is actively working to address these with operators to alleviate those concerns. All of the bays are being trialled under the powers of an Experimental Traffic Order which means the Council is able to make modifications where necessary throughout the 18-month trial period. In the first instance, the Council is working with operators to set strict action plans and holding them to account of their duties to comply with the contractual agreements in place. Where required, bays will be suspended and/or removed should no improvement be seen in those locations. Officers are also investigating the possibility of further coverage and density of the bay network to address issues of over-crowding in specific locations.</p>
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