

Westminster Community Participation Charter



Foreword

Cllr Sanquest

I'm delighted to be launching Westminster Council's first ever Community Charter – our commitment to working with residents and putting you at the heart of decision making.

The council should be flexible and always working for you. That's why we worked with residents to bring together the Community Charter, setting down how we want to work with you and what you can expect from us. As a councillor, but more importantly as a Westminster resident, I'm proud to be launching a charter that puts residents at the forefront.

The Community Charter sets out our commitments to Westminster's communities, as well as highlighting the work that's already taking place to make our services more accessible. As part of our , we are committed to being more transparent whenever residents interact with us. No matter your issue, no matter your background or identity, you can expect Council staff to treat you with respect. The charter is designed to make council processes more resident-friendly and interactive. Our commitment is to



Our commitment is to listen to you when we make decisions; to be open and honest with you; and if there's a problem, we'll try to make it right.

listen to you when we make decisions; to be open and honest with you; and if there's a problem, we'll try to make it right, and if we can't, we'll explain why.

We didn't come up with this charter alone - hundreds of residents and staff contributed to the commitments outlined within the charter. However, there is more to do – and we'll continue to push ourselves and listen to your feedback to ensure that we get it right. The focus will be on the priorities identified by you: Transparency, Accessible Services, Empathy, Inclusivity and Accountability. You can find out more about these and what they mean in the Charter.

It's been wonderful to meet with residents from across Westminster throughout this process. Thank you to everyone who took the time to contribute to the Community Charter.



Councillor Cara Sanquest
Cabinet Member for Communities

Introduction

This charter sets out our shared principles, and expectations for genuine and meaningful participation, engagement, and decision-making with the communities of Westminster.

The charter forms a key part of the council's commitments within the to build a Fairer Westminster that supports and celebrates its diverse communities.

The charter ensures that we are accountable to our communities, are resident-led and remain committed to delivering high standards in how we work with our communities to shape local services. Residents have helped design this charter, and all council services have been consulted and are committed to delivering the promises outlined here.

Through this charter, we aim to enhance resident's experience by ensuring equity, fairness and inclusion are at the core of our service delivery. Our goal is to place residents' experiences and voices at the heart of the council's decision-making processes.



Our Community Promise: “Working Together for a Better Westminster”

What’s this all about?

- It’s our plan, co-produced with residents, for how we’ll work with you to deliver accessible and inclusive services.
- We’re committed to fairness, and to celebrating our diverse communities.
- This promise is part of our bigger plan to create a Fairer Westminster.

Why does this matter?

- It keeps us honest - you can hold us to account.
- It shows an active commitment to putting Westminster’s communities at the heart of decision-making.





How did we create this?

- > We didn't do this alone - we worked in partnership with residents.
- > We also collaborated with council services, to ensure that everyone is dedicated to delivering on these promises.

Why do we need this?

- > To build trust and confidence in what we do.
- > To ensure inclusivity, providing fair and equal treatment for all residents, in line with our commitment to being an anti-racist council.
- > To be transparent and clear about how decisions are made.

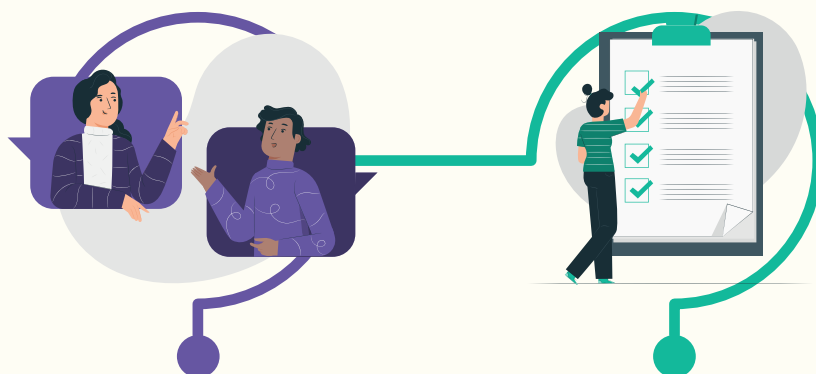
How will we do it?

- > We'll monitor our progress with clear success measures outlined in this charter.
- > We'll work across council teams to embed the charter's principles into everything we do.

How did we design the Charter?

The Westminster Community Charter is a shared commitment between the council and our local residents.

The development of this document was a collaborative effort, ensuring that both council staff and the community played an active role from start to finish. We held open conversations, both in-person and online, actively listened to the diverse voices of our residents and staff and used these discussions to help shape this charter.

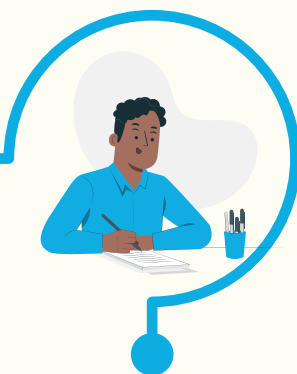


Throughout this process, we engaged with over 150 residents and staff from every council department. This joint effort allowed us to create a charter that reflects the input of residents and can be implemented across our services.

Residents contributed to the charter at community events, pop-up stalls, and through a 2023 survey that gathered 134 responses. Following this, 12 residents joined in detailed design discussions, helping to confirm our five key themes and priorities.



In April 2024, we held four staff workshops to review feedback, further explore the five themes, and identify best practices and improvement opportunities.



Over the summer of 2024 we finalised the draft charter and gathered internal approval.



In September 2024, 11 residents who had been involved from the start took part in a feedback workshop to review and refine the final draft.

The council would like to thank all residents who took the time to contribute to the development of the Westminster Community Charter and worked with us to ensure we will continue to deliver on our promise to deliver on our Fairer Westminster plans for all communities.

Charter Principles

Our conversations with residents highlighted five key areas that they want us to priorities. These areas form the core of the charter.

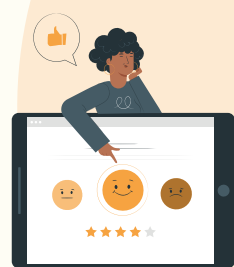
Inclusivity

Residents want services that respect and embrace diversity, ensuring everyone feels heard and valued and be committed to take ownership of issues raised in a more empathetic and inclusive way.



Transparency

Residents want to receive up-to-date information on council projects and initiatives, and they want services to follow up with them when they contact the council about an issue. Residents would also like to know what the council's yearly plans and priorities are.



Accountability

Residents want to see more accountability across the organisation, from council officers, services, and contractors. They also asked for clear guidance on how to raise concerns, escalate issues and for leadership to lead by example.

Empathy

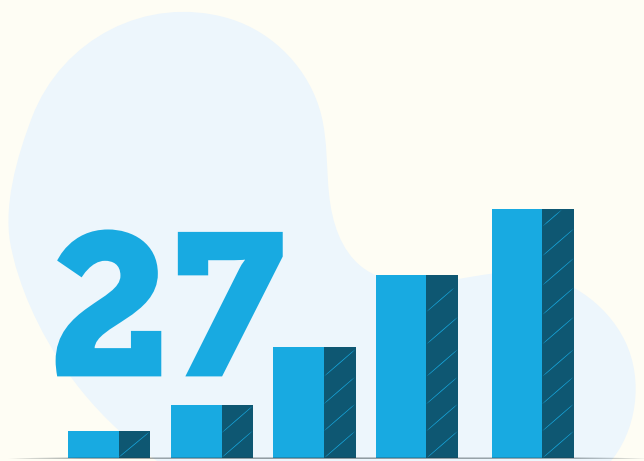
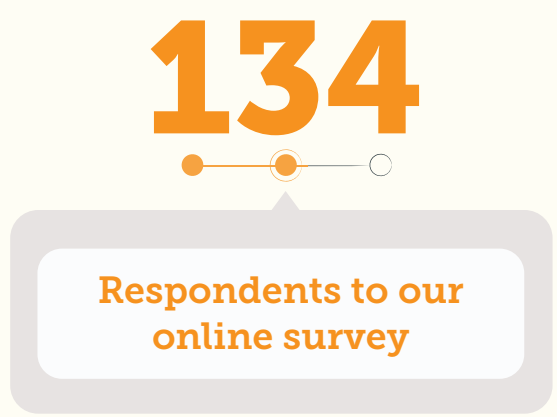
Residents asked that our staff listen to them, respect differences and take ownership of issues raised in a more understanding and inclusive way.



Accessible Services

Residents want services that are easier to access, with staff who are more visible in the community to break down barriers.





Key Promises and Success measure outcomes



Transparency

You told us that you want to receive up-to-date information on council projects and initiatives and want services to follow up with them when they contact the council about an issue. You also said you'd like to know what the council's yearly plans and priorities.

We will

✓ Streamline processes

We'll make our structures and processes clearer so that when you contact us with a query or issue, you can reach the right person quickly.

✓ Improve communication

We will improve the way in which we promote consultations, engagement activities and events so you'll always know what's happening.

✓ Forward planning

We will make it easier to view our upcoming plans so that you can easily be involved and actively contribute to the council's decision-making processes.

✓ Provide timely feedback

We will ensure that you receive timely feedback on consultation outcomes and decisions.



How will we do this?

We have a webpage where you can find details for all [Council Services](#).

- For general enquiries, please call [020 7641 6000](#).
- To find out more about paying your business rates, licensing your business, commercial waste and special events, please call [020 7641 7000](#).
- Find out about parking permits for residents and businesses, disabled badges and suspended parking bays, please call [020 7823 4567](#).
- To find out how to claim Housing and Council Tax Benefit to help pay your rent and council tax, please call [0800 072 0042](#).
- To find housing information and applications and advice about being homeless please call [020 7641 1000](#).
- We have a team of Housing Officers across Westminster whose job it is to help you with any housing related issues. You can see who your [Housing Officer](#) is on the website.
- We will ensure that our council events are advertised clearly on our website and that our [Events Page](#) is kept up-to-date.
- Residents can search for and get alerts about consultations in their area and on issues they care about via [The Council's Engagement Platform](#).
- All households in Westminster receives a copy of the ['Your Westminster'](#) magazine.
- The council publishes an annual to outline what is planned for the year ahead and beyond.
- We will communicate the outcome of engagement activities and next steps through sharing 'you said, we did's' on [The Council's Engagement Platform](#).

Accessible services

You told us that you want services that are easier to access, with staff who are more visible in the community to break down barriers.

We will

- ✓ **Create opportunities to connect**
Throughout the year, we will provide chances for communities to meet with relevant council officers.
- ✓ **Accessible services and staff:**
We will make it easier to connect with services and staff in local community settings.
- ✓ **Encourage resident participation**
We will provide various ways for residents to actively engage in decision-making and we will work with residents continuously to understand your needs.
- ✓ **Simplify access to services**
We will make it easier for residents to access and engage with our services.



How will we do this?

- We will ensure council services are represented at community events.
- Staff inductions will include opportunities for staff to be out in the community.
- A dedicated team works in the North Paddington area with engagement officers based in the south and central wards who are on hand to support residents and deliver place-based projects and activities.
- Our new [Community Hubs](#) are helping tackle inequalities and improve outcomes, supporting a Fairer Westminster.
- We've opened four new [Housing Service Centres](#) in Queen's Park, Charlwood Street, Soho, and Bayswater which are open Monday to Friday for drop-ins. To book an appointment with a specific team call [0800 358 3783](tel:08003583783) or email housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk. Further information is available via the website.
- The [Housing Resident Forum](#) is open to all Westminster housing residents to discuss shared challenges and opportunities.
- Family Hubs are a new way of bringing together all the support you may need as a family. Visit [Family Hubs](#) on our website for information on the hubs and services they offer.
- [Westminster Libraries](#) remain spaces for learning, connecting, and accessing information about council services.
- In 2022 we launched the Register of Active Residents to make it easier for you to get involved in engagement and consultation activities. You can sign up to the [Register Of Active Residents](#) on our website.
- We will continue to review how residents access our services and make improvements. Our new Community Equalities Strategy, launching in 2025, will include a toolkit to help our services improve access for residents and an action plan with timelines and ways to measure progress and improvement.

Empathy

You asked that our staff listen to you, respect differences and take ownership of issues raised in a more understanding and inclusive way.

We will

✓ Identify ourselves

We will always introduce ourselves to residents and let them know who they are talking to.

✓ Mutual respect

We will make sure all our interactions with communities are constructive, based on mutual respect between council staff and residents.

✓ Encourage resident participation

We will provide various ways for residents to actively engage in decision-making and we will work with residents continuously to understand your needs.

✓ Simplify access to services

We will make it easier for residents to access and engage with our services.

How will we do this?

➤ We will ensure all our frontline staff have customer empathy training to better understand and respond to residents' needs.

➤ We will clarify how we will address issues and ask how residents would like us to communicate progress.

➤ Through our Give16 staff volunteering programme, we will commit to supporting community initiatives to better understand our communities and support local projects.

➤ Through our Community Hubs, we will embed a 'no wrong front door' approach, supporting residents to answer queries or signpost to the relevant person.



Inclusivity

You asked that services respect and embrace diversity, ensuring everyone feels heard and valued, and be committed to take ownership of issues raised in a more empathetic and inclusive way.

We will

✓ Offer engagement opportunities

We will provide a variety of ways for people to get involved and contribute to decision-making.

✓ Inclusive consultations and conversations

We will ensure our consultation and engagement activities are accessible and inclusive and we continue to improve the way we involve our residents.

✓ Accessible information

We will ensure relevant information, documents, and updates are easily accessible, so everyone has the information they need to participate in a Fairer Westminster.



How will we do this?

- We will ensure that we deliver consultations that are inclusive, engaging with under-represented voices in Westminster.
- We will proactively work to include residents who are experts by experience in our consultation and engagement activities.
- We will make sure that key consultations include in-person engagement and provide different ways for people to respond, so that everyone has an opportunity to have their say.
- We have adopted an anti-racist approach to ensure all our policies, procedures and services are inclusive, equitable and anti-racist. Visit the [Anti-Racist Organisation](#) page on our website for more information.
- We offer several digital inclusion programs, including Digital Ambassadors, to provide extra support to residents who need help with their digital skills. This is part of our [Smart City](#) programme.
- For residents with specific vulnerabilities, we will ensure they receive the support needed to access our services.
- The council's website can be translated into 20 languages for improved accessibility.
- The council's websites meets and often exceeds legal website accessibility requirements. All engagement materials will be written in clear, jargon-free language.
- We offer assistance to vulnerable and physically disabled residents to attend in-person meetings and engagement events.
- [British Sign Language](#) (BSL) interpreters are available on demand through Sign Solutions via the council's website or by request.
- You can speak to staff via an interpreter through the contact centre.

Accountability

You told us that you want to see more accountability across the organisation, from council officers, services, and contractors. You also asked for clear guidance on how to raise concerns, escalate issues and for leadership to lead by example.

We will

✓ Clear communication

We will tell residents when and how we will respond to them when they contact us, and have straightforward channels for reporting issues, providing suggestions, and raising concerns.



How will we do this?

- Housing & Corporate Contact Centre: We aim to answer 70% of calls and webchats within 30 seconds.
- Council Tax & Business Rates: We aim to respond within ten working days. Residents can use the [Council Tax](#) online services for faster processing.
- Parking: We aim to answer 80% of calls within 30 seconds and respond to written inquiries within ten days. Some responses may take longer due to legal and third-party factors.
- In 2024, Housing launched the council's first Repairs Policy, this provides clear information on when residents can expect repairs to be done and the service, they should receive. You can read more in our [Repair's Charter](#).
- We have a clear procedure and timescale for [Complaints](#). We will acknowledge all complaints in five working days and will let you know when you'll receive a response.
- Residents and businesses can easily report street-related issues online using [Report It](#).
- Westminster residents, workers, and students can now ask questions about local or broader council issues in person at [Full Council](#) meetings.
- Residents can share [Positive Feedback](#) on the compliments page of the website to let us know what's working well.
- By the end of 2024, the GovMetric tool will be available across the website and via email, making it easier for residents to provide feedback.
- When redesigning digital services, we will conduct thorough user research to better understand residents' needs.



Measuring success

As part of the council's commitment to delivering on the promises of this charter, it is important that we can measure the impact. To help, we have developed a set of measures that we will monitor and report on to help us and you understand how we are doing.

Transparency

- Publish all public consultations on Westminster's Engagement Platform, with at least four weeks for comment and feedback.
- To continue to increase the number of residents that view the council as open and transparent (67% in the 2023 City Survey, up from 58% in 2021).
- To increase the number of residents that believe the council does a good job of keeping them informed about its services and benefits (currently 72% based on the 2023 City Survey, up from 60% in 2012).

Accessible services

- To continue to increase the percentage of residents who have seen or used council communications (currently 73% based on the 2023 City Survey, up from 68% in 2021).
- To achieve over 2,000 visits to our Community Hubs across the year 2024 to 2025.

Empathy

- To continue to increase the number of residents that believe the council cares enough about its vulnerable residents (currently 65% based on the 2023 City Survey, up from 55% in 2021).
- To increase the percentage of residents interested in engaging with the council (currently 33% of residents via the 2023 City Survey, - no previous data available).

Inclusivity

- To increase the number of sign-ups to the My Skill's Zone platform to 1,200 people by November 2025.
- To reduce the level of digital exclusion across the borough by supporting 1,000 residents with digital inclusion initiatives in 2024/25.

Accountability

- To increase the number of residents that believe the council involves them in the decisions made about their local area (currently 62% based on the 2023 City Survey, up from 49% in 2021).
- To increase the number of residents who have signed up to the Register of Active Residents to over 250 by the end of 2024.



Embedding the charter across the council

We are committed to embedding this charter throughout the council by taking the following actions:



Senior Leadership

- **Focused Community Engagement**
Community engagement is a key priority across the council, with regular reporting to track progress.
- **Amplifying Resident Voices**
We will ensure residents' input is valued in decision-making through [Our Westminster](#).
- **Encouraging Dialogue**
We will create opportunities for meaningful conversations with communities and residents.
- **Co-production Approach**
Where possible, we will involve residents in designing and delivering service changes or provide alternative engagement options.



Council Processes

- **Service Planning**
The charter will inform service planning, resource allocation, and delivery planning.
- **Workforce Development**
The charter will help shape our new People Strategy, ensuring all staff are informed of and aligned with its principles.
- **Transparent Reporting**
We will encourage open reporting on service changes, explaining the reasons behind decisions and what influenced them.



On the Ground

- **Frontline Awareness**
All frontline staff will be made aware of the charter's principles to ensure consistent service delivery. The charter will be displayed in all public council buildings.





We offer a full translation service for the Community Charter.

We can also provide the charter in alternative formats such as braille, large print and audio.

Please email: consultations@westminster.gov.uk

Illustrations used in this document made by Storyset