

<b>Committee:</b> Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee	<b>Dated:</b> 8 July 2022
<b>Subject:</b> Update on Housing Service Projects and Priorities	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1, 2, 4, 11, 12
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Liam Gillespie, Head of Housing Management	

### Summary

This report is intended to give Members a summary of significant projects and initiatives which are intended to update and improve the services we provide to our residents and support the outcomes in our Housing Strategy and Corporate Plan.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The Housing Division is undergoing substantial changes as part of the wider Target Operating Model restructure across the City Corporation's operations. To build on these changes, several important projects are due to take place to ensure that services are relevant and accessible to residents living on estates managed by the Housing Division.
2. These projects include a full review of customer services delivered to our residents and a refreshed resident involvement and communications offer.
3. This report is intended to give Members more information about these projects and other service improvement initiatives which are currently underway or planned.

## **Improvement projects**

### Housing customer service and repairs review

4. A full review of customer service functions across housing management and repairs is due to start in July 2022. This will be a substantial project and, in brief, will involve:
  - a full evaluation of current customer service activity and relevant policies, strategies and objectives
  - the creation of a clear vision for the future of housing customer services, developed alongside residents and other stakeholders
  - options for closing the gap between current services and the desired 'future' service, with analysis of potential costs and risks
  - an implementation plan to achieve the identified improvements, including staff development and training needs
  - consideration of staff development and training needs, to support improved customer service provision
5. The review will look at the service we provide via estate offices, telephone, e-mail, correspondence and in person, including through contractors. The review will focus on services from the resident perspective, identifying barriers and enabling processes to be redesigned with resident needs in mind.
6. New customer service standards and monitoring mechanisms will be produced, to enable us to report on performance to residents and Members.
7. Residents and Members will be invited to participate in the review. Officers will provide a more detailed update on this project in due course.

### Resident involvement and communications

8. A new *Resident Involvement and Communications Strategy* is due to be produced, to redefine our involvement offer and improve our understanding of our residents' priorities and needs. We will also rethink resident communications, to ensure they are clear, accessible, timely and relevant, using a variety of channels.
9. As part of this work, we will look at current involvement mechanisms such as the Housing User Board (HUB) and refresh or change them to better meet residents' needs, while designing new opportunities for residents to scrutinise and influence housing services delivered by the City.
10. Residents and Members will be involved in the production of the new strategy.

### Fire safety guidance and communications

11. We are currently reviewing our fire safety policy and associated guidance for residents. This will include the delivery of a new Fire Safety Policy to replace the

previous protocol, and a new co-produced guidance document for residents about safety in communal areas.

12. Officers have been working with CALM Mediation and a resident representative to draft a new document about resident use of communal areas, which aims to balance fire safety priorities with residents' enjoyment of communal spaces on their estates. This document will shortly be taken out for wider consultation with residents before it is finalised.
13. Fire safety communications will form an integral part of the *Resident Involvement and Communications Strategy* mentioned above and we aim to take a more systematic approach to communications around fire safety issues, to ensure consistency and clarity.

#### Automated payments line

14. As part of an initiative led by the Chamberlain's Department, an automated telephone payments system is due to be introduced. The Housing Division is working with Chamberlain's colleagues to take advantage of this new system and enable tenants to make rent payments via telephone without the need to speak to a member of staff. This will be more convenient for tenants, offers increased data security and reduces staff time spent taking payments via telephone.
15. Tenants can currently pay their rent via automatic and one-off bank transfers, online through our website, via telephone, or by using a rent payment card at PayPoint outlets and the Post Office.

#### Estate security audits

16. Security audits have been completed across all estates and the recommendations are being considered. Further work is required to assess the potential cost of improvement works. The cost of implementing some of the recommendations could be significant and careful consideration will have to be given to the potential demand on HRA funding given the scale of other ongoing projects.

#### Estate accessibility audits

17. Following a successful pilot audit of Middlesex Street Estate completed earlier in 2022, accessibility audits for the remaining housing estates have been commissioned and are due to be carried out by October 2022. The audits will assess the physical environments against applicable accessibility standards and provide recommendations for improvement, to ensure our estates are safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces for residents and visitors.
18. These audits are closely linked to the estate security assessments. The outcomes of both audits will be considered together, to ensure that a coordinated approach is taken to making any changes to residential blocks or communal areas.

### Estate services improvements

19. To build on the successful introduction of a new Estate Standards and inspection regime in 2019, and the creation of a dedicated Estate Services team earlier in 2022, further improvements are planned to our practice in this area.
20. Officers are due to carry out market testing with a view to procuring specialist caretaking management software, which will give greater oversight of routine and ad hoc caretaking and cleaning tasks on our housing estates.
21. Several potential software solutions have been identified, which could enable us to create schedules of daily, weekly and monthly cleaning tasks, which staff will access on the move via handheld devices. They will then mark them as complete and provide evidence as they go, using embedded photo and video functions. Non-routine tasks could also be raised and allocated to staff in response to issues reported by residents or noted by Estate Supervisors. Estate inspections could also be contained in the same system.
22. This software will enable greater oversight of performance in estate cleaning and caretaking, leading to a more systematic and less reactive approach. It will also support greater accountability to residents, as it would be possible to show evidence of time and resources spent on estate cleaning and caretaking.
23. Officers are reviewing gardening practices following the formation of the new team. Contracts for gardening services are due to end by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022. An assessment of current gardening equipment is being completed and we are intending to phase out petrol-powered machinery wherever possible, in favour of electric tools.

### New tenancy agreement and handbook

24. A revised tenancy agreement and handbook is currently being drafted. The new tenancy agreement will have a clearer format and some revised clauses relating to important issues like antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse. A fully revised Handbook for tenants will be introduced, which will contain important and useful information about living in a City Corporation home. A statutory consultation exercise will be completed as part of the review of the tenancy agreement.

### New homeowners' handbook

25. A new handbook for homeowners is being drafted, which will replace the basic guidance booklet previously in use. The new handbook will contain important information on lease rights and obligations, and a plain English explanation of lease terms. A consultation will be conducted on the draft document, and this may include more focused work with Residents' Associations and other groups, to ensure that a range of views are captured.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

### **Strategic implications**

26. These projects support the delivery of the outcomes in the Housing Strategy 2019-23 and the following outcomes in the Corporate Plan 2018-23:

1. People are safe and feel safe
  - c. Protect consumers and users of buildings, streets and public spaces
  - e. Educate and reassure people about safety.
2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
  - c. Provide advice and signposting to activities and services
  - d. Provide inclusive access to facilities for physical activity and recreation
4. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need
  - a. Bring individuals and communities together to share experiences and promote wellbeing, mutual respect and tolerance
  - b. Support access to suitable community facilities, workspaces and visitor accommodation.
11. We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment
  - a. Provide a clean environment and drive down the negative effects of our own activities
  - b. Provide thriving and biodiverse green spaces and urban habitats.
12. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained
  - a. Maintain our buildings, streets and public spaces to high standards

## **Conclusion**

27. This report is intended to update Members on several important projects which are intended to improve the services we provide to residents living on our estates and enhance resident involvement in the delivery of these services.

28. Members will receive regular updates on these projects as they progress.

## **Appendices**

- None

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