



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Cabinet

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Monday 11th December, 2023**, Rooms 18.01 & 18.02 - 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Adam Hug (Chair), Aicha Less, Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Geoff Barraclough, David Boothroyd, Paul Dimoldenberg, Liza Begum and Matt Noble

**Also Present:** Stuart Love, Bernie Flaherty, Sarah Newman, Pedro Wrobel, Gerald Almeroth, Frances Martin, Debbie Jackson, Sarah Warman, Jay Akbar, Manisha Patel, Richard Cressey

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Tim Roca and Councillor Cara Sanquest

#### 1 WELCOME

Cllr Hug welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it would be livestreamed with a recording to be made available online.

#### 3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 2 MINUTES

Cllr Hug, with the consent of the Members present, agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> October were a true and correct record of the proceedings.

#### 6 "CARE LEAVER" TO BE CONSIDERED ALONGSIDE PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

Cllr Hug introduced the item and invited Sarah Newman, Bi-borough Executive Director for Children's Services, to speak to the report.

Sarah Newman noted that this initiative came out of the care review completed by Josh MacAlister, and that although government have not yet accepted this

recommendation but local authorities around the country are now considering as part of their local offer.

Sarah Newman highlighted that the Council is already doing most of what is required through housing pathways, employment and apprenticeships, but applying 'Care Leaver' as protected characteristic ensures it becomes part of the Council's Equality Impact Assessment and given formal consideration.

Sarah Newman noted that children now do not leave home until 27 on average and given that the Council supports care leavers up to 25, this decision strengthens the Council's offer.

Sarah Newman noted that care leavers had been consulted on the decision and were in support.

Cllr Hug noted the importance of the decision due to his experience of working alongside care leavers over many years and that the Council must do what it can as corporate parents to support.

Cllr Less echoed Sarah Newman's comments and commended the report.

**RESOLVED: Cabinet approved the following recommendations:**

- Approve the inclusion of 'Care Leaver' to be taken into account alongside the nine protected characteristics already legislated for in the Equality Act 2010.
- Note that Westminster City Council's senior leaders will work together to providing enhanced work experience, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities, including cognising their particular needs systematically as part of EQIAs and ensuring that they are considered across all strategies, responsible procurement and commissioned contracts.
- Note the commencement of a programme of work which includes:
  - Reviewing our EQIA and Equalities programming (internal and corporate) to include care leavers
  - Adapting our EQIAs to include consideration of care leaver status
  - Reviewing and adapting recruitment policies and procedures in order to guarantee care leaver applicants an interview where when they meet the essential criteria for a role being advertised
  - That every Directorate commits to providing mentoring, work experience and apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers

#### **4 OXFORD STREET PROGRAMME - COMPLEMENTARY SCHEMES**

Cllr Hug invited Cllr Barraclough to introduce the report and noted that the report was before Cabinet as part of a commitment to maximum transparency on decision-making for the Oxford Street Programme.

Cllr Barraclough noted that the progress in 18 months since it was found that the Oxford Street District Programme had cost over £35m and delivered the Marble Arch Mound.

Cllr Barraclough noted the ambition of the previous administration to pedestrianise Oxford Circus without consulting the community or businesses, but that the Council has since refocused the programme to Oxford Street itself, and worked closely with NVEC to produce a scheme that meets the needs of retailers, shoppers and residents through wider pavements, improved lighting, extra trees, upgraded pedestrian crossings.

Cllr Barraclough noted feedback was very supportive through consultation in summer 2023.

Cllr Barraclough highlighted this decision is for three small complementary schemes, which are critical to the delivery of the primary programme and were only to be brought forward if they could be co-funded with the private sector which has been achieved.

Cllr Barraclough invited Bernie Flaherty, Deputy Chief Executive and Bi-Borough Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health, and Manisha Patel, Director of Operations, Governance and Oxford Street, to speak to the report.

Bernie Flaherty noted that the three schemes will bring benefits within their own right for pedestrians, amenities, and the surrounding environment.

Manisha Patel noted that these three schemes were retained from a much larger Oxford Street District Programme and it was agreed that these schemes complemented the primary scheme on Oxford Street best.

Manisha Patel noted that the Council now has further clarity around scope of the schemes and idea of cost, and discussions on funding have progressed.

Cllr Dimoldenberg noted his support for the programme, and expressed confidence that it will be delivered on budget and will significantly improve the Oxford Street environment.

**RESOLVED: Cabinet approved the following recommendations:**

- Approve the activation of the final area of the programme and commencement of design for the three proposed OSP complementary schemes as set out in the report;
- Approve the funding approach for the three complementary schemes as set out in the report.

**5 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS (INCLUDING COUNCIL TAX LOCAL REDUCTION SCHEME) AND COUNCIL TAX BASE REPORT**

Cllr Hug noted that this is an annual report that the council must consider and make recommendations to Full Council on, and invited Cllr Boothroyd and Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director of Finance and Resources, to speak to the report.

Cllr Boothroyd noted that the aspects of the report which the Council have discretion over are the council tax support scheme for people on low incomes, and the properties on which it is appropriate to increase council tax charges.

Cllr Boothroyd highlighted that the cost-of-living crisis is not over, which is why Council wants to continue 100% relief for eligible households as well as a discount for flood victims, vulnerable residents and care leavers.

Cllr Boothroyd highlighted a new premium on council tax for properties that have been empty for one year instead of a minimum of two, and an increase to the premium for those that remain empty over five and over ten years.

Cllr Boothroyd noted that the report also gives notice of a premium on second homes, which will begin in 2025.

Gerald Almeroth noted that the tax base has grown by 1 percent which adds £600k to council funding for the Budget next year.

Cllr Hug welcomed that any action that will bring empty homes back into use.

Cllr Barraclough noted the need to take all action to disincentivise people from second or empty homes.

**RESOLVED: Cabinet approved the following recommendations:**

- Approve the following recommendations for the financial year 2024/25:
  - (i) that the Council Tax discount for second homes remains at 0%
  - (ii) that the Council Tax discounts for empty properties, including the discounts that replaced the previous Class A and C Council Tax exemptions, remain at 0%.
  - (iii) that a Long-Term Empty Property Premium continues at the maximum percentages allowed for by the current legislation for the 2024/25 financial year. which includes commencing the premium a year after a property has been empty, rather than the current 2 years.
  - (iv) that the Director of Revenues & Benefits be given delegated authority to determine any individual local discount applications received from Council Taxpayers during the 2024/25 financial year under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- Recommend that the Council approves the same Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 which has operated successfully since 2013/14. The scheme is based on the Default Scheme Regulations, updated to reflect changes made via the Prescribed Requirements Amendment Regulations and with War Disabled Pensions, War Widow, Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation scheme payments disregarded in full when calculating a claimant's income. The same disregards should also apply to Housing Benefit and claims for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).
- Recommend to the Council to resolve that the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 for the Whole City is 137,295.64 equivalent Band D properties, for Montpelier

Square alone 96.96 equivalent Band D properties and for Queen's Park 3,700.40 equivalent Band D properties.

- Recommend to the Council to resolve that the figures set out in the above paragraph for the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 be used by the Council to make a determination pursuant to the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- Determine to implement a 100% Second Home Premium for the 2025/26 financial year, which is the earliest date allowed for under the new legislation.

## **7 FEES AND CHARGES REVIEW**

Cllr Hug noted that this was an annual report which Cabinet must take a decision on and invited Cllr Boothroyd and Gerald Almeroth to speak to the report.

Cllr Boothroyd noted that it was comprehensive and coordinated look at fees and charges, which make far greater contribution to the Budget than annual council tax.

Cllr Boothroyd noted that fees are generally increased by September CPI which the Council was intending to follow.

Cllr Boothroyd highlighted that there are specific areas where there are additional costs or Council fees are out of line comparable and the increase will be greater, which allows the Council to keep some fees down in specific services, for example health and wellbeing group activities in leisure.

Gerald Almeroth noted inflation using here is 6.7% and that where policy is different to just recovering costs or the Council has a specific policy aim, that is set out separately.

Gerald Almeroth noted that some charges to be implemented in January and would impact income to the Council in the current year.

Cllr Hug noted his thanks for the work on the report.

Cllr Barraclough highlighted that discretionary planning fees are increasing to ensure a high-quality service which has been discussed and agreed with the real estate industry.

Frances Martin noted that the report stated that emissions based charges were subject to a call-in, and that the meeting had been held and no changes had been made.

### **RESOLVED: Cabinet approved the following recommendations:**

- Approve the changes to fees and charges as outlined in Appendix 2 of this report

- Approve that authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Finance and Resources to make minor or technical adjustments to any fees and charges in year, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.
- Approve the unchanged Fees and Charges Policy at Appendix 1.
- Note the outcome of the call-in on the parking fee structure review which is being heard on 6 December 2023, the outcome of which will be reported to the Cabinet orally at the meeting.

The Meeting ended at 6.54 pm

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_