



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# **DRAFT MINUTES**

## **WESTMINSTER SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission held on  
Monday 3 September 2012 at 7.00pm in Committee Rooms 6 & 7,  
17<sup>th</sup> floor, City Hall, Victoria Street, London, SW1 6QP

**Present:** Councillors Sarah Richardson (Chairman), Ian Adams, Andrew Havery  
and Barrie Taylor

**Also present:** Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of Westminster City Council

#### **1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

- 1.1 Councillor Sarah Richardson was proposed as Chairman of the Commission by Councillor Ian Adams and seconded by Councillor Barrie Taylor. She was elected unopposed.
- 1.2 The Chairman welcomed Members of the Commission, the Leader of the City Council and officers to the meeting.

#### **2. MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brian Connell.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 3.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **4. MINUTES**

- 4.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### **5. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE LEADER OF WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL**

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Commission received an update from Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of Westminster City Council, on current and forthcoming issues within her portfolio. These included the 2011 Census Outputs; the work of the West

End Commission; and the Better City Better Lives framework and priorities, which would form the basis of the Leader's speech in March 2013.

- 5.2 The Leader commented that the combination of future funding following the 2011 Census Outputs and proposals for the business rate retention were major issues which could have a significant impact on the City Council over the next few years. The Commission noted that the Census Outputs had been particularly robust, and had made a number of assumptions which were being challenged. Although more detailed statistics would be made available in October, the City Council would be lobbying for some elements of the Census to be reviewed. Members noted that the Census outputs would be discussed in greater detail later in the meeting.
- 5.3 The Leader commented on the progress being made by the West End Commission, which was working towards a long-term strategic framework to ensure that the City met the future needs of residents, businesses, communities and visitors, while continuing to occupy its place within London and the global economy. The Commission noted that the retail tradition of the West End was being challenged by other shopping centres, and acknowledged that the prestige of the West End as a unique centre for theatre, restaurants and clubs needed to be maintained. The Leader suggested that the needs of the West End should be taken into account when determining planning issues.
- 5.4 Members sought clarification on measures that were being taken in connection with the provision of Primary School places in Westminster, and noted that proposals to establish new schools were moving forward. The Commission acknowledged that the provision of school places was a London-wide issue, and suggested that neighbouring boroughs work together to resolve cross-boundary school placements.
- 5.5 The Leader commented that Westminster had been consistent in enabling children to be placed at one of their top-three school choices, and confirmed that a more detailed response to the issue of school places would be submitted to Policy & Scrutiny by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Community Protection.
- 5.6 Members commented on the impact of the London Olympics on shopping in the West End, and highlighted the effectiveness of the City Council's work in reversing the initial downturn.
- 5.7 The Leader wished to record her thanks to officers, and to the Chief Executive, for their efforts and work in connection with the London Olympics. The Commission echoed the Leader's comments, and congratulated the Leader on her response to the recent issue of night-time parking in the West End.

## **6. CENSUS 2011 OUTPUTS**

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Commission received an update from Damian Highwood (Intelligence & Analysis Manager) and Mike Moore (Chief Executive) on the first results published from the 2011 Census; and on the potential negative

impact that the result may have for the Council's funding baseline within the Business Rate Retention model, effective from 2013 onwards. The Commission noted that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) had considered that the population in Westminster had been previously overestimated.

- 6.2 Damian Highwood reported that the ONS output for Westminster had shown a reduction in population of 20,000 from previous mid-year estimates. While the population of London as a whole had grown as a result of the census, the reported fall in Westminster had been mirrored in other areas. The Scrutiny Commission noted that only rudimentary city-level data had been received from the ONS at this stage, and that more detailed statistics would be received over the coming months.
- 6.3 The Chief Executive reported that no indication of the reduction had been given during previous meetings with the ONS. In response to the Outputs, the City Council had asked 18 questions which sought an explanation of the methodology that had been used and how data had been interpreted. The Chief Executive and Barbara Moorhouse (Chief Operating Officer) had also met with the National Statistician to challenge the ONS findings, on the basis that the mid-year estimates and final census could not both be right; and that the initial figures that had been given appeared to be inconsistent with administrative data.
- 6.4 The ONS had been asked to release detailed data, to determine whether the outputs were plausible at a local level or across community groups. Emphasis would be given to the unique position of a global city like Westminster which was completely atypical with that of other boroughs, and which had a high number of temporary and transitional groups and residents, together with a high migration of visitors such as commuters. The Scrutiny Commission acknowledged that the use of a standard method approach to gather and interpret data may not be appropriate or favourable to Westminster. Members noted that the ONS had indicated that they were not averse to working to find other ways of mapping the City, and to identify other drivers and factors that drive costs.
- 6.5 Members discussed the methodology that had been used by the ONS, and suggested that issues of tenure in Westminster, such as company-owned properties and lets, and the effect of benefit changes on population movement needed to be taken into account. The Chief Executive commented that the statistics given for the number of older people in Westminster were also being challenged.
- 6.6 The Leader considered that the ONS had made a number of assumptions in determining the 2011 outputs, and commented that there were cohorts in Westminster, such as ethnic and transitory groups, who may not have engaged in the census process but needed to be taken into account. Damien Highwood acknowledged that Westminster comprised of many small ethnic groups, and confirmed that the City Council wanted to test the thematic and geographical population in areas such as China Town or Edgware Road which were affected by specific factors and dynamics such as multi-occupancy.

- 6.7 Members commented that the ONS also needed to take into account the high number of second homes in Westminster, and suggested that the use second residents made of services in Westminster during particular times of the year needed to be determined, so costs could be reduced by providing appropriate levels of service during periods of high demand. The Commission noted that the location of second residents in Westminster may be more clearly defined when additional data was released by the ONS.
- 6.8 The Scrutiny Commission also discussed the potential impact that non-national working men and their families who lived in Westminster had on funding areas such as children's services. Damien Highwood commented that the ONS had considered that some 7,000 short-term migrants lived in Westminster for a period between 3 and 12 months, which the City Council considered to be a low estimate.
- 6.9 Although the City Council had discussed the response to the business rate retention and population figures with LB Camden and RB Kensington & Chelsea, detailed data would not be available in time for a rational case to be built illustrating that the figures given for Westminster were inappropriate. Pending completion of negotiations with the ONS, the City Council would suggest that a different population base be used, such as mid-year estimates or the previous population projections.
- 6.10 The Commission discussed the timing of the Census, and agreed that the 10 year gap between surveys was too long for the assessment of the dynamic population in Westminster, and noted the system in place in America where fewer questions were asked more often. Members considered that gaining central data planning over a 10 year period was not effective, consistent or fair, and suggested that the Census should move away from data and consider the demand for services month by month.
- 6.11 The Scrutiny Commission acknowledged that the Census Outputs were critical in determining the future budgets of the City Council and NHS, and noted that £80,000 had been invested in lobbying the ONS over the last two years. Members noted that if appropriate, the City Council's response to the Outputs could be escalated by commissioning an independent body to cross-refer data to geographical area, or by referring the findings up to the National Statistics Authority, highlighting concerns as a matter of public transparency.
- 6.12 Members questioned whether the City Council could have worked better and done more to get residents to complete the Census forms, and considered whether to arrange a public meeting where problems could be highlighted. More detailed data was expected in November, which would inform how the City Council would proceed and whether the level of lobbying should escalate.
- 6.13 Members noted that Mark Field MP and Karen Buck MP had been briefed on the publication of results, and that Mark Field had secured a Westminster Hall debate on the census on 4 September.
- 6.14 The Commission agreed that the Chairman would discuss the 2011 Census Outputs with Councillor Andrew Havery, as Chairman of the Housing, Finance & Customer Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee, and that the issue would

be discussed further at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 8 November.

## **7. EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY AND SCRUTINY**

- 7.1 The Commission received an update from Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Officer), on progress in the recommendations to enhance the Scrutiny Process at Westminster, which had been made at the meeting on 20 March 2102 (Minute 7). Since Annual Council on 16 May, the number of Policy & Scrutiny Committees, including the Commission, had reduced from 7 to 5, with Committees meeting more often.
- 7.2 Mark Ewbank reported that goals included in the recommendations which had been met included greater involvement of expert witnesses at meetings, and working more closely with partner boroughs on cross-cutting issues.
- 7.3 The Scrutiny Commission commended the scrutiny work that had been undertaken in connection with the Imperial Hospital NHS Trust, and highlighted the recently established Sex Workers Task Group as an example of how scrutiny could be effective and have positive results. Members also highlighted the importance of public engagement, particularly in Tri-Borough working.
- 7.4 The Commission agreed that although more time was needed to assess whether the effectiveness of Policy and Scrutiny and level of Member involvement had improved, progress had been made, and it was important that the current level of enthusiasm and focus be maintained.

## **8. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

- 8.1 The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIRMAN \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_