



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# **MINUTES**

## **WESTMINSTER SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission held on  
Thursday 8 November 2012 at 7.00pm in Committee Rooms 5 & 6,  
17<sup>th</sup> floor, City Hall, Victoria Street, London, SW1 6QP

**Present:** Councillors Sarah Richardson (Chairman), Brian Connell, Andrew Havery and Barrie Taylor

**Also present:** Mike More (Chief Executive).

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Adams.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 2.1 No Declarations of Interest were made.

#### **3. MINUTES**

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### **4. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

- 4.1 Mike More (Chief Executive) updated the Scrutiny Commission on significant issues of corporate interest that may be relevant to Scrutiny Committees as areas for potential policy development. 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.
- 4.1.1 The Commission discussed the development of Community Budgets, and noted that that Civil Servants had been seconded over recent months from the Treasury Department and Ministries of Justice and Health, to work with the City Council in identifying areas of potential reform, and to co-produce a series of workable solutions that would simplify systems and make them more affordable.

- 4.1.2 The Commission noted progress in Tri-Borough working, and highlighted the value of working with other local authorities outside of the Tri-Borough partnership to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of services. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Tri-Borough partners continued to benefit and learn from one another, with improvements having been achieved in addressing youth offending and violence, and in education. The Chief Executive commented that although now less topical, Tri-Borough working had become established as the way business was done. Services that would be subject to Tri-Borough integration over forthcoming months included the administration of Human Resources and Finance, and Business Intelligence. A pilot scheme was also in progress that sought to reduce unnecessary delay for children undergoing care proceedings, and which would in turn lead to a reduction in legal costs at a Tri-Borough level.
- 4.1.3 Members discussed the development of work and skills in Westminster, and acknowledged that skill training was currently not properly aligned with job availability. The Commission acknowledged that incentives were needed to ensure providers offered training in areas where employment capacity was likely to grow. The City Council was seeking to create employability programmes in partnership with secondary schools, which would also offer school leavers transitional support.
- 4.1.4 The Commission discussed the Housing Revenue Account, and proposals that would reduce constraints on borrowing, enable more homes to be constructed for families with lower and middle level income, and reduce intermediate housing. Members acknowledged that lower and middle income families were being forced out of London, which was not good for the economy or social mix.
- 4.1.5 The Chief Executive provided an update on the City Council's submission to the West End Commission, and highlighted the important role to be played by Westminster in providing leadership in the development of a vision for the environment, business and residents. The Chief Executive acknowledged the importance of not becoming complacent, and the challenge of seeking to maintain the international pre-eminence of the West End. Although a high level of support had been shown for the West End Commission, Members considered that the level of vision shown in the City Council's submission had been poor. Although the submission had not been designed as a detailed strategy, the Chief Executive acknowledged Members' concerns and agreed that a broad vision for the West End was needed.
- 4.1.6 Other areas of ongoing development highlighted by the Chief Executive included the potential savings and service improvements that would arise from the integration of adult and social care; the role and potential impact of Westminster's Clinical Commissioning Groups; and initiatives to improve services and save resources by establishing mechanisms that would be proactive in seeking to prevent adult re-offending and provide support for families with complex needs.
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Commission received performance data for Quarters 1 and 2, and agreed that consideration would be given to future meetings of the Commission being scheduled in line with the release of quarterly assessments. Performance issues discussed included HR data and staff

illness, the use of agency staff, and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

- 4.2.1 The Commission noted that although the number of days agency staff stayed at the City Council had been reduced by tight controls, costs were off track through more agency staff being employed than targeted. The Chief Executive confirmed that the use of agency staff was being monitored monthly at Director level, and agreed to conduct a further review to ensure numbers were as low as possible. The Commission acknowledged that the implications of future funding could add merit to the use of temporary staff.
- 4.2.2 Members sought clarification as to why the performance data showed that 400 posts remained unfilled. The Chief Executive commented that the main causes of the vacancies were the choice to use agency staff or to delay recruitment, and by service departments deciding not to fill posts. Although the issue of vacant posts had been raised with departmental Directors, the Chief Executive considered that it was currently not a productive time to undertake a detailed review.
- 4.2.3 The Commission discussed the findings of the recent staff survey, and noted that although there had been some improvement in levels of staff satisfaction in many areas, the results for Adult Social Care were poor. Members also acknowledged that the reputation of the City Council had been adversely affected by controversial issues such as the recent proposals for parking
- 4.2.4 The Chief Executive commented that although sickness absence rates were good, he was not fully confident that all sick leave was being reported. He confirmed that this issue would be raised with Council Departments, and commented that consideration was being given to introducing an annual rolling of sick leave.
- 4.2.5 Members discussed targets for the length of time spent in bed and breakfast accommodation. The Chief Executive acknowledged that long term occupancies of 6 weeks and above were not appropriate, and confirmed that measures were being taken to explore the better deployment of properties in Westminster. The City Council was also seeking to procure accommodation, and was working with other Boroughs to provide an option for people to move outside of Westminster.
- 4.2.6 Members commented on discrepancies between priority measures and performance frameworks, and in the number of associated targets. The Chief Executive acknowledged that the lists were inconsistent, and agreed to provide more detailed information. He also considered that the performance data provided an opportunity for the Scrutiny Chairmen to identify issues that could be taken back to their respective Committees.
- 4.3 The Commission commended the success of the 2012 London Olympics, and highlighted the need for the City Council to capture the legacy benefits in improved and integrated services, and in partnership working with partners and other services.

4.4 The Commission also commended the ongoing work on fraud that was being undertaken by Councillor Lindsey Hall, and Members agreed that although the time taken to process new benefit claims was over target, it was preferable that claims took as long as necessary to ensure they were right and to avoid fraud.

4.5 The Commission thanked the Chief Executive for attending the meeting.

## **5. CENSUS 2011 OUTPUTS**

5.1 The Scrutiny Commission received an update from Damian Highwood (Intelligence & Analysis Manager) and Mike More (Chief Executive) on progress in determining the plausibility of the 2011 Census results. The Commission noted that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) had considered that the population in Westminster had been previously overestimated.

5.2 The Commission noted that the City Council had submitted a series of questions to the ONS, but had so far only received a generic response at a theoretical level rather than specific details. Requests for data and census notes of field properties which would provide background had also been refused, on grounds of confidentiality and the timing of releasing detailed information.

5.3 The City Council's strategy was to continue to lobby the ONS for further information, and the Commission noted that a letter had been sent to the UK Statistics Authority urging them to examine the details of the Census results. The Chief Executive reported that doubts regarding the 2011 Census Outputs had been raised in Westminster Hall debates by Mark Field (MP for Cities of London & Westminster) and Karen Buck (MP for Westminster North); and that the Leader of the City Council would also be meeting with the Secretary of State to highlight concerns. Members asked to receive a written update on progress in the review of the Census results, together with details of the costs of lobbying.

5.4 The Chief Executive questioned whether the Census gave an accurate reflection of how costs in the West End were determined, and suggested that it would be more appropriate if future estimates for Central London were driven more by demographic data.

5.5 The Commission asked to be kept up to date with additional information received from the ONS. Members also agreed that dependant on the timing and level of further data that was received, consideration would be given to the next meeting of the Commission scheduled for March 2013 focussing on the 2011 Census Outputs, and being held in the House of Parliament.

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

6.1 The Commission received an update from Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Officer), on progress following the recent reconfiguration of the Scrutiny Process at Westminster. Members were invited to consider:

- The future concerns, going forward, in relation to the activities of Policy & Scrutiny.
- Whether the Commission had any envisaged outcomes by the end of the current municipal year.
- Whether there were any gaps in the work programmes of each of the Committees which could be covered by the Commission.

6.2 The Commission noted the Work Programmes of Westminster's Policy & Scrutiny Committees, and discussed the progress and effectiveness of the current Task Groups, and training events. Members suggested that the scrutiny budget could be used more effectively by commissioning research projects that could influence policy and contribute to its development; and that consideration be given to the use of Apps and other social media in communicating with residents and service users and in promoting Westminster.

## **7. END OF MEETING**

7.1 The meeting ended at 8.38 pm.

CHAIRMAN \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_