



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** Committee held on **Wednesday 16th July, 2014**, Rooms 6 & 7 - 17th Floor, City Hall.

Members Present: Councillors Ian Adams, Brian Connell, David Harvey, Tim Mitchell and Barrie Taylor

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 There were no changes to the membership.
- 1.2 Councillor Ian Adams was appointed as Chairman for the municipal year.
- 1.3 The Committee noted that, in future years, open nominations for the Chairmanship should be requested from Commission Members in preparation for an election and appointment at the first meeting of the municipal year.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor David Harvey declared that, in relation to Item 3 (Growth Deal for London) he was a Director of The Family Firm Institute and former President at the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.
- 2.2 Councillor Barrie Taylor declared that, in relation to Item 3 (Growth Deal for London) he was a member of Paddington Youth Enterprises Ltd.
- 2.3 Councillor Tim Mitchell declared that, in relation to Item 3 (Growth Deal for London) he was a Governor of City Lit.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 9th April 2014 as a correct record.

4 GROWTH DEAL FOR LONDON

- 4.1 Mr Steve Carr, Head of Economic Development, introduced the report which provided an overview of the Growth Deal for London which had recently been

agreed between Government and the London Enterprise Panel, the Mayor of London, London Councils and London boroughs. Mr Carr summarised the context of the Growth Deal including the negotiations, opportunities arising from the Deal and Westminster's involvement to date and going forward.

- 4.2 Members were informed that negotiations in respect of the employment aspects of the Growth Deal for London had been led by Westminster's Chief Executive (jointly with the Chief Executive of the London Borough of Islington) on behalf of partners across the Greater London Authority (GLA), Central London Forward (CLF - the partnership of the eight central London local authorities); and London Councils. This negotiation produced a pioneering agreement regarding the delivery of employment services and the provision of better access to jobs in the growing economy. It is also a route to securing greater freedoms, flexibilities and funding to drive growth and jobs in London. The CLF will now work in partnership with London Councils, the GLA, the London Enterprise Panel and Government, to establish a joint project team to develop a time-limited, five-year initiative for Employment Support Allowance claimants in Central London.
- 4.3 Mr Carr explained that the Deal has embedded within it key principles around local government service reform, collaborative working; and the devolution of services to enhance local authorities' ability to support economic development and growth. In fact through the negotiation, significant commitments on devolution had been secured, thereby ensuring that success will unlock a series of progressive steps towards further local service integration across London.
- 4.4 Majeed Neki, Senior Policy Officer, provided Members with an overview of the next steps in the process and its implementation. Mr Neki explained that, over the next three months, alongside the detailed design of the scheme, a timetable will be agreed for specific steps towards devolution linked to the performance of the initiative. There will also be a detailed agreement on how successful performance of the initiative will lead to the approach being extended to other areas of London and scope widened to address other services. Ultimately there is an aspiration to negotiate to retain a share of the savings created, through reduced expenditure on benefits and reduced demand for broader public services, by helping people into work.
- 4.5 Mr Neki explained that the initiative will see each claimant working with a single, multi-skilled caseworker, over a long period of time, to help them implement a plan of action which addresses their individual needs. This will involve a multi-agency approach, working closely with existing council, health and voluntary sector services, to provide specialist support such as mental health provision or specific skills training to guide the individual through their journey towards work.
- 4.6 The Committee discussed the tension between the 'supply' of families and unemployed residents requiring assistance and the demand for both sustainable employment and housing. In agreement with Members, Mr Neki explained that enhancing individuals' skill-set, and working closely with individuals to ensure they have the right skill-set to attain suitable

employment, will be key to the programme. In this context Mr Neky detailed that the measures included an allocation to the London Enterprise Panel of £65 million for a suite of skills-related enhancement schemes including: capital investment in skills institutions in London; investment in a pilot digital skills programme; greater influence for London to ensure that nationally funded skills provision through the Skills Funding Agency meets London priorities; and support for a single integrated apprenticeships offer for London employers. This will be an excellent platform from which more can be achieved going forward.

- 4.7 In respect of housing, Members were informed that the Growth Deal also included greater flexibility to borrow money against housing stock in order to deliver more affordable homes. Members heard that Westminster will initially receive £8.5 million of additional borrowing capacity to help deliver more affordable homes and will continue to advocate for flexibility in this area. The Committee discussed the financial details cited in the report and requested that further information be provided in respect of the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) and the aforementioned £8.5 million of additional borrowing capacity.
- 4.8 In response to questioning from Members regarding whether a 'Westminster-specific approach' had been taken, Mr Neky explained that the main focus for Westminster to date has very much been to support our hardest to help residents to overcome barriers and move towards employment. He noted that the City Council already commissions a range of successful programmes to support residents into employment, including the Workplace Coordinator scheme and the recently launched FACES programme for families with barriers to employment. However, these have been on a relatively small scale compared to the extent of the long-term unemployed cohort within Westminster. The primary challenge for the City Council will be to effectively target those residents with complex needs and multiple barriers to employment, which requires co-ordination locally. Mr Neky further noted that the aforementioned approach of having a single, multi-skilled adviser assisting a small caseload of individuals to guide the individual through their journey towards work, is one which has been built upon the 'Troubled Families' programmes.
- 4.9 In relation to the role of the specialist adviser, Members noted the importance of ensuring that people with the right level and type of 'life coaching' experience and skills are recruited to the programme. Although the exact specification of the adviser/life coach role had not been defined in its entirety, nor the recruitment planned, Mr Neky suggested that one way in which the advisers' skill-set could be assured was through an 'adviser academy' to train individuals at the same level.
- 4.10 In relation to the matter of future targets, the Committee were informed that this will be subject to further discussions with Government over the coming months at the design stage. Although the Government has already committed to involving London authorities in co-designing the successor to the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Work Programme. The latest evaluation of the aforementioned DWP Work Programme to help the long-term

unemployed move off benefits and into sustained employment, showed just a 5% success rate. Specific attention will therefore be given to investigating ways in which a commitment could be made to achieve a higher than 5% success rate, although the measure of “success” in this respect is yet to be defined. Members agreed that interim steps towards employment, which have clear tangible benefits in themselves, should also be evaluated as part of the defined terms of the success of the programme.

- 4.11 In response to a query from Members around the research which had been undertaken and/or relied upon to support the programme principles and evidence its likely success, Mr Carr explained that a broad range of detailed economic and social research studies had been investigated to inform the approach. He noted that a number of different models (universally) had been considered. The key message taken from the successful programmes related to the necessity to target specific geographical areas and work with communities at a local level.
- 4.12 The Committee discussed the fact that the concentration of entrenched worklessness in the Borough was located in North Westminster, within social housing and among older residents (50+), with a high proportion of residents experiencing significant barriers to employment, particularly relating to mental health issues. Members discussed the various demographics and circumstances in specific locations within Westminster’s Wards, which vary according to a very local ‘village level’. The Committee suggested that Ward Members could be integral to providing this type of local knowledge to inform the approach of the programme according to area and requested that consideration be given to how Councillors could usefully provide this local knowledge.

4.13 RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted; and
- (2) That the Committee be provided with progress updates as necessary.

5 BETTER CITY BETTER LIVES PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES - END OF YEAR UPDATE 2013/14

- 5.1 The Committee received the update which provided detail relating to the progress of 120 Cabinet Member Priority Projects and Activities which are linked to the Better City, Better Lives (BCBL) ambitions. Members noted that of these 55 (46%) had been completed and a further 58 (48%) are on track to be delivered in 2014/15 or as part of the BCBL Year 2 programme. However, the remaining seven priority projects in 2013/14 have either missed deadlines or are on hold.
- 5.2 Whilst Members commended the completion and/or ‘on track’ rating of the vast majority of projects and activities contained in the report, the Committee fundamentally questioned the usefulness of the measures themselves. Members agreed that it was important to understand the processes which

support the achievement of key projects, but emphasised that those process-based elements (e.g. *conducting a review* of the wardens programme or *supporting* a roll-out of Wi-Fi provision) should not be considered to be 'headline' measures of success in themselves. In the future the Committee requested to receive only the few quantifiable, end-user based measures, which relate to the most significant BCBL projects. The Committee further suggested that the strategic performance reports submitted to other formal Council bodies could usefully be revised to reflect this approach next year.

5.3 RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted; and
- (2) That a recommendation be made to the Leader of the Council in respect of the suggested improvements to the Council's strategic performance reports, as detailed in paragraph 5.2 above.

6 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

- 6.1 The Committee considered the report, which was submitted at the request of Members, to address the issue of continuing training and development for Members of the Council. The report provided an indication of what could be provided and sought a steer on the type and level of training Members would wish to see provided going forward.
- 6.2 The Committee noted the timeliness of conducting a review of Member training and development, given the recent local elections and the number of new Members who had been elected to the City Council. The Committee recognised that, whilst many Members have a wide ranging and rich skill-set gained academically, personally or professionally, there are many skills and areas of knowledge which are unique to local government and to the role of a Councillor in Westminster. Members' need for adequate training and development should not therefore be underestimated on the basis of assumed knowledge and skills.
- 6.3 It was noted that Members (particularly those recently elected) are unclear about what training and development opportunities can be provided and, furthermore, what types of training are acceptable to request? This lack of direction and guidance may therefore deter Members from raising requests for training.
- 6.4 The Committee agreed that whilst offers of training should be reactive to Member requirements on an individual, Council-role or Committee-role basis, officers should equally be proactive in informing Members of the training opportunities available and how these can be arranged or accessed. In this respect, Members suggested that a skills or training audit could usefully be undertaken to ascertain the appetite for different types of training. Members noted that a formal evaluation of the Member Induction Programme was due to be undertaken over the coming months and the aforementioned audit to inform the future direction of Members training could usefully be incorporated.

- 6.5 The Committee suggested that, as a starting point, the following training and development areas should be explored:
- Basic Council-specific information not covered in the Member induction programme such as key officer contacts at front-line level, as opposed to Strategic Director level;
 - A tour of the Borough and site visits to key Council buildings and/or places of significance (i.e. where headline projects are being undertaken);
 - Council finances – both in terms of the overarching framework of how local government is funded (external training) and how the City Council’s finances operate and are managed at a local level (internal officer-led training);
 - Council democracy and governance – how the committee framework and the Leader and Cabinet Member decision-making model operates; how formal reports are prepared; how information can be accessed; and key contacts in this respect;
 - How external training providers and/or professional bodies such as Local Government Association, London Councils, Local Government Information Unit and Universities can offer best practice training across a range of areas and functions.
- 6.6 In respect of accessing information, Members noted that a new Council website had recently been launched, in addition to a new Committee Management system (Modern.Gov). The Committee therefore suggested that all Members should be informed of how to access Committee, Council and Cabinet Member Reports and documents and key contacts in this respect (perhaps through the Weekly Information Bulletin or a one-off bespoke email addressing the matter).
- 6.7 **RESOLVED:** That the Scrutiny Manager, Head of Cabinet Secretariat and Member Services Manager be requested to consider how Member training can be developed and enhanced going forward, in light of the Committee’s suggestions as detailed above.

The Meeting ended at 8.41 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____