



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

## **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Thursday 26th January, 2023**, Hybrid, MS Teams and Rooms 18.01-03, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Patricia McAllister (Chair), Melvyn Caplan, Paul Fisher, Angela Piddock, Rachael Robathan, Karen Scarborough and Jason Williams.

**Also Present:** Councillor Adam Hug (Leader of the Council), Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Shama Sutar-Smith (Head of Culture and Strategy), Pedro Wrobel (Executive Director of Innovation and Change) and Clare O'Keefe (Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor).

#### **1 MEMBERSHIP**

1.1 There were no changes to the membership.

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

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3 MINUTES**

3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting on 6 October 2022.

#### **3.2 RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2022 be signed by the Chair  
as a correct record of proceedings.

#### **4 POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATES**

4.1 The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Communities, City Management and Air Quality (CCMAQ) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Williams. The Commission was updated on the following:

- At the CCMAQ Committee's last meeting, Members received an update from Councillor Dimoldenberg (Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality) on his portfolio.
  - The Committee had an in-depth look at parking services and also the subject of flooding.
- 4.2 The Commission received a verbal update from Councillor Fisher for the Finance, Planning and Economic Development (FPED) Policy and Scrutiny Committee. The Commission was updated on the following:
- At the FPED Committee's last meeting in November, Members received updates from Councillors Barraclough (Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development) and Boothroyd (Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform).
  - The next meeting of the FPED Committee will consider the impact of COVID-19 on Council finances and potentially the Oxford Street Programme.
  - The meeting of the FPED Committee scheduled in December was cancelled as a result of congestion in the scheduling of meetings and was decided in consultation with all Members of the Committee.
  - The gap in the calendar for the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group might not be necessary and this will be looked into for the next municipal year.
- 4.3 The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Children and Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector (CAPHVS) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Piddock. The Commission was updated on the following:
- Update from Councillors Nafsika Butler-Thalassis (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector) and Tim Roca (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Young People, Learning and Leisure).
  - At the last meeting, the CAPHVS Committee took a deep dive into the Children and Young People Plan which included youth violence, family hubs and falling school rolls.
  - In addition, Members spoke about the ongoing issue of bed blocking in the Adult Social Care portfolio.
  - There was an interesting report from the NHS on planned orthopaedic in-patient surgery in North London and this plan was met with general approval, but concerns were raised about travel and patient choice.
  - Committee Members understood that although the Children's Service team is outstanding, issues around child protection are increasing along with the complexity of cases.
  - The Committee also discussed the Adult Safeguarding Report.
- 4.4 The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration (CAHR) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor McAllister. The Commission was updated on the following:

- The CAHR Committee received a paper on the major works programme, which Members found interesting. Discussions were held on the cycles of work and how certain areas in the North of the borough, where work is long overdue, have now been included on the programme.
- Members have found that Housing Services have given interesting sessions and have answered follow up questions promptly.
- The Committee also received a paper on Ebury regeneration which was found to be interesting, and Members were given lots of detail.

## **5 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

- 5.1 The Commission received a written update from the Chief Executive of the Council on forthcoming and current issues.
- 5.2 The Commission was pleased to receive a verbal update informing them that Katherine Eaton (Special Events) received the title of Royal Victorian Order for services to the Platinum Jubilee. The Commission stated that this was very well deserved, and congratulations were offered to Katherine.
- 5.3 The Commission understood that the engagement scores for the City Survey and Our Voice Staff Survey have improved which highlights a correlation between delivery of world class services and being a world class employer.
- 5.4 The Chief Executive responded to questions on the following topics:
- The training of contact centre staff and the learning which is built into this; learning from past errors, engagement, and knowledge of estates and contractors. Some service areas have not been meeting standards due to pressures and investigations into the frequency of repeat calls have been undertaken.
  - The timeline of the review undertaken by Professor Manthorpe CBE into the Council's response to COVID-19 and, given the significance of the review and that it could impact best practice going forward, whether this will be going to the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise.
  - The scope of the Manthorpe review and whether it will be purely inward facing or if the NHS will be included, especially in relation to the vaccine rollout.
  - The Council's representation at the Local Government Association relating to the national investigation into the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and the level of detail this will go into, especially as there has historically been limited information on local vaccine rates in Westminster.
  - The specific actions being undertaken to identify hotspots of inappropriate behaviour at work which was highlighted in the Our Voice Staff Survey. Concern was raised about the percentage of those who report inappropriate behaviour, but the Commission was pleased with the transparent approach on both the results and next steps.
  - The emergency Cost-of-Living Crisis measures and whether the funds provided are adequate and if information is disseminated in the most efficient and wide-reaching way; schools were identified as a helpful tool to circulate information.

- Participation in the Church Street ballot; which residents participated and what number does the turnout of 73 percent represent.
- The increase of in-borough Temporary Accommodation and the costings of this.
- The Our Voice Staff Survey, it's position on the next Scrutiny Commission agenda in the workforce update and whether staff grievance statistics could be incorporated into the update including: number of grievances raised, the amount of grievances resolved, staff satisfaction, the number which have been settled externally and the cost to the Council.
- The organisations which conducted the City Survey and Our Voice Staff Survey, the honesty of the reports and the transparency with staff.
- The potential spending implications of the Future of Westminster Commission recommendations being unknown and the difficulty this presents when considering a Medium-Term Financial Plan.
- The officer-Member protocol relating to information sharing and the significant delays in responses. Concern was raised about the fact this has been getting progressively worse and whether the root causes had been identified.
- The effect of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on families living in Temporary Accommodation out-of-borough and ensuring that they benefit as much as possible from help that is available to those living in Temporary Accommodation in-borough.
- The reach of Green Doctors, whether more information can be given out in relation to the work they do, and their potential attendance at Ward and Housing surgeries.

#### 5.5 **ACTIONS:**

1. The review undertaken by Professor Manthorpe CBE into the Council's response to COVID-19 should be added to the CAPHVS work programme along with the suggestion that the NHS rollout is given due consideration.
2. The Commission will receive clarity on paragraph 2.3 in the report which comments on reducing the Housing Benefit burden on the Council.
3. The Commission will be provided a breakdown of the Church Street ballot, especially the number of residents the 73 percent turnout represents.
4. The Commission will be informed of the increase of in-borough Temporary Accommodation and the costings of this.
5. The workforce update coming to the Commission on 28 March 2023 will look to include information on staff grievances.
6. Councillor Caplan will provide examples of cases where the officer-Member protocol has not been followed adequately.
7. The support concerning families living in Temporary Accommodation out-of-borough and ensuring that the appropriate support is provided.
8. The publicising of Green Doctors will be investigated, as well as their attendance at Ward and Housing surgeries.

## 6 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

6.1 The Commission received an overview of the Community Participation report from Pedro Wrobel (Executive Director of Innovation and Change). Pedro Wrobel responded to questions on the following topics:

- The Quality Improvement Board and the role of residents on this and how they are recruited.
- The 'Register of Active Residents' might only engage with those residents the Council is already engaged with when any list should be consistently demographically diverse for it to be meaningful.
- The balance between Councillors exercising their elected roles and residents exercising their constituent roles in participatory budgeting.
- Engagement and participation across the whole borough will need multiple different processes as residents and communities represent themselves differently between and within wards.
- Managing the expectations of residents especially when it comes to decisions which are not able to be delivered in the way which has been suggested by residents.
- The wording of consultations should be considered especially when it comes to residents wishing to answer in a way which is restricted by the options on consultation forms.
- Raising the standards of consultations across the board to ensure that micro-consultations in particular are not repetitive.
- Whether it can be ensured that consultations are not only online to make sure that those who are digitally excluded, housebound, isolated or cannot afford internet are not prohibited.
- The role of amenity societies and residents associations in community participation as they can sometimes tend to represent themselves rather than residents and communities.
- The timeline for the Community Participation Charter.
- The evidence behind the decision to pilot community grant schemes in some wards in the North of the borough who may have disproportionately benefitted from this despite community participation being a wholistic piece of work.
- The apparent dearth of momentum to establish the online consultation hub.
- The presence of the Communities team in the City's schools to gain insight from not only young people but others in the community who regularly go to schools but might not go to resident's forums for instance.
- The success of the community grants programmes.
- Community languages and their verbal and written use in the community by officers.
- Examples of participatory budgeting in terms of a whole budget rather than examples of targeted funding.
- The degree of catharsis around community involvement in policy and budget setting: it is an opportunity for residents to feel heard, particularly in the areas which affect them most.

6.2 The Commission recognised that whilst Community Participation would usually be a topic for the CCMAQ Policy and Scrutiny Committee, the

Commission had spoken a number of times about participatory budget setting and community participation in priority-setting. The Commission recognised that there is a large amount of work to do to in the community participation space and that specific details in this topic will be picked up by the CCMAQ Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

6.3 The Commission acknowledged that participatory budget setting is highly innovative, especially when it comes to re-forming structures the Council has in place and taking budget setting out to residents and making it more transparent. However, an important role is garnering interest from residents in the Council's administration of funds.

## 7 **WORK PROGRAMME**

7.1 The Commission reviewed the work programme and discussed the following:

- The Emergency Preparedness report could be a written report at the next meeting of the Commission rather than a separate item. If there are any significant changes however these can be discussed.
- The Commission's meeting in June will discuss the Annual Scrutiny Report for the 2022-23 municipal year, the recommendations of the Scrutiny Independent Review by the Centre of Governance and Scrutiny and the Future of Westminster Commission recommendations.

The meeting ended at 20:29.

**CHAIR:** \_\_\_\_\_

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