



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Thursday 22nd June, 2023**, Rooms 18.01-03, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Concia Albert, Lorraine Dean, Paul Fisher, Tim Mitchell, Angela Piddock (Chair), Mark Shearer (virtual) and Jason Williams.

Also Present: Councillor Adam Hug (Leader of the Council), Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Ian Parry (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) (virtual), Richard Cressey (Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison) and Clare O'Keefe (Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

- 1.1. Nominations for the post of Chair were invited.
- 1.2. One nomination was received by Councillor Paul Fisher.
- 1.3. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Tim Mitchell.
- 1.4. There were no further nominations.
- 1.5. **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Angela Piddock be appointed Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1. The Chair extended her thanks to her predecessor, Councillor Patricia McAllister.
- 2.2. The Chair welcomed Councillors Concia Albert, Lorraine Dean and Tim Mitchell to the Commission.
- 2.3. The Commission noted that Councillor Mark Shearer was attending as substitute for Councillor Rachael Robathan.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1. There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

4.1. The Commission approved the minutes of its meeting on 3 May 2023.

4.2. RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

5. POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATES

5.1. 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 last meeting of the CCMAQ Committee, Members received updates from the Cabinet Members. The Committee discussed a mental health pilot within the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and dog fouling.
- Superintendent Beth Pirie (Central West Basic Command Unit), attended the meeting and answered questions on joint working between the Council and police, issues around Stop and Search, data, and how Global Majority residents are treated.
- The Crime and Disorder item also considered the police's policy when dealing with mental health calls and the impact on Council services and emergency services.
- The Committee received an update on parking and discussions included the use of mobile phones and apps to pay for parking and debt chasing.

5.2. 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:

- The Chair of the FPED Committee stated that the planned meeting had been moved by one week and put his apologies on record to the Chief Whips for both Groups. The rescheduled meeting was held on 14 June.
- The Cabinet Member Updates received by the Committee were noted as understandably limited because of the short amount of time between the previous Committee meeting.
- The Committee held detailed discussions on the Meanwhile Activations Programme which included filling vacant properties on Oxford Street as well as the next phase of the project which focuses on longer-term experimental projects.
- The meeting was noted as being productive.

5.3. The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration (CAHR) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Albert. The Commission was updated on the following:

- It was noted that it was Councillor Albert's first meeting as Chair. The meeting was moved by two weeks due to the uncertainties around the lifts in City Hall.
- The Committee received key updates, including information on housing allocations.
- The Cabinet Member for Housing Services was not present at the meeting but Councillor Maggie Carman, Deputy for Housing Services, attended to answer questions and was praised for stepping in.
- The Climate Action portfolio was also discussed, where there were updates on new works and awards that have been won which was noted as positive.

5.4. 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:

- The recent meeting of the CAPHVS Committee had a full programme.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector provided an update for the ongoing Gordon Hospital situation and the recent signing of the Ethical Care Charter which had been viewed positively.
- The Cabinet Member for Young People, Learning and Leisure informed the Committee about the opening of the Bayswater Centre as well as the difficulties surrounding the increased complexity of needs that Children's Services are facing.
- The Committee received the Voluntary and Community Sector Investment Strategy, the Professor Manthorpe report investigating the Council's COVID-19 pandemic response of which followed a useful and interesting discussion, and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- The Committee also heard a called-in decision which, following an in-depth examination, culminated in the agreement that the decision would stand.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

6.1. The Commission received a written update from the Chief Executive of the Council on forthcoming and current issues. The Council's achievement of Disability Confident Leader Status was welcomed by the Commission and the challenge put forward by the Able Network, Staff Networks, staff across the Council and Unions was noted to have facilitated the accomplishment of this important status.

6.2. The Commission received a verbal update from the Chief Executive on the recent tragic, fatal, stabbing of a teenager outside Westminster City College. The Commission understood that the Council responded holistically and continue to provide support to Council staff who have been affected by this loss.

6.3. The Commission was also updated on the successful 75th Windrush Anniversary event which took place earlier in the day. 300 residents and businesses from across the City were present to both celebrate and learn. The entire event was put together by Council staff and, going into what is typically recognised as a busy season for events, recognition was given to those staff who facilitate and enable the events to be the success that they are.

6.4. The Commission recorded its thanks to the staff who have responded to the tragic loss of life and also to those staff who contribute to the success of events across the City.

6.5. The Chief Executive responded to questions on the following topics:

- Night Stars volunteers; the improvements to the system of logging in and out, especially considering that the Council did not know the Night Stars had been arrested as their phones were taken off of them, the procedures for the volunteers going forward and the offers of aftercare by the Council.
- Night Stars apology; the Commission stated that there are perhaps two apologies to be made as a result of the lack of communication, 1) to the Night Stars despite the ongoing investigation, and 2) to the Council, bearing in mind that the police failed to notify the right officers and failed to take note of the insignia on the jackets. The Commission asked whether an apology would be forthcoming.
- Asylum seeker protest in Pimlico; the Commission recognised the stress caused to the asylum seekers and asked what the Council is doing to hold the Home Office to account for their failure to communicate, what protocols are in place to navigate any further issues that occur and whether the Council is close in these negotiations to ensure that this does not happen again.
- Disability Confident Leader; it was noted that the Disability Confident Leader status is a fantastic achievement and credit should also be given to the successful Westminster Employment Service. The Commission however asked for the strategic rationale behind the decision to take the Westminster Employment Service out of Adult Social Care and place it in the Economy team.
- Ethical Care Charter; Stage Three provides a link to the London Living Wage and other conditions of employment, including travel. Whilst laudable, the Commission asked whether this has been fully costed.
- Lift operations at City Hall; lift operations are complex and most who access City Hall rely on these. The Commission asked for an update on the situation, level of disruption predicted and any unperceived risks.

6.2. ACTIONS:

a) That the Commission will receive information relating to the rationale behind the Westminster Employment Service being moved out of Adult Social Care and into the Economy team.

b) That the Commission will receive information on the increased cost to the

Council regarding Stage Three of the Ethical Care Charter which concerns the London Living Wage and other conditions of employment. This information will be provided in due course as part of the budget setting process.

7. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

- 7.1. The Chair introduced the Scrutiny Improvement Review report and informed the Commission that the previous Scrutiny Chair commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to undertake a review of policy and scrutiny at Westminster. The Chair stated that this an exciting point in time for Westminster's scrutiny function as the review provides the tools to make scrutiny more relevant to the Council and residents as well as more impactful. The Commission was pleased that there are many positives in the review and noted that Members going forward should feel confident to be engaged in purposeful scrutiny.
- 7.2. The Chair invited Ian Parry (CfGS) to provide a brief overview. The Commission understood that the review found that the Council has all the components for good scrutiny and improvement if it can be developed in the right way. It was noted that the key ingredient to achieving good scrutiny is commitment and acceptance to do things differently. There is the opportunity to develop a new vision which includes; focusing on the needs and experience of Westminster residents and stakeholders, measurable impact, being independently minded to explore issues and alternative approaches, prioritising topics, increase public engagement and strengthen local democracy. The Commission noted CfGS's offer to support the implementation of recommendations.
- 7.3. The Chair invited Members to provide general comments on the report and overall direction of travel. Members discussed the following:
- Splitting Adults and Public Health and Children's Services; despite currently being merged in one committee (CAPHVS), the two subject areas are vast, especially considering the statutory duty to health scrutiny and recent changes the NHS has made locally.
 - Cabinet Member scrutiny; the importance of having Cabinet Members present at scrutiny meetings to answer questions on their portfolios. This ensures accountability as well as provides an opportunity for scrutiny to understand the breadth of work in the portfolio and inform scrutiny Members about potential items for future investigation, and befitting work programming.
 - Format of reports; it should be ensured that reports are accessible and digestible, as well as finding different ways to present information.
 - Ownership of work programmes; the importance of all scrutiny Members having input to these, especially when considering last minute changes. Interim reports may be of use to keep Members informed which, in turn, should help Members to set agendas.
 - Discussions on work programmes; the difficulty sometimes in getting the work programmes engaged with and what is the best practice of doing so.
 - Vision for scrutiny; how this is done, whether it can evolve over time and how Members will be engaged in the formation of a vision.

- Thematic committees; the benefit of thematic analysis and investigations and that Cabinet Member portfolios should be distributed across the committees adequately to ensure that they are able to be taken together through themes.
- Training; this should be ongoing and at least one training session should focus on strategic, forthright questioning to ensure that effective scrutiny is carried out during formal meetings as opposed to those which are discussion-based.
- Transitions; ensuring actions and recommendations remain at the forefront and do not get forgotten or lost especially if there is a transition or change.
- Commitment to change; the importance of committing to make changes, especially when considering a move to thematic committees and stepping away from the habit of performance managing Cabinet Members whilst still scrutinising the Executive effectively, as well as the health service.
- Depoliticising meetings; how this works in practice and extracting political point-scoring in meetings if politics cannot be removed from scrutiny.
- Pace; there are quick changes that can be made but also medium-term and long-term considerations to be made.

7.4. The Commission thanked CfGS for the thorough report which had been produced and those who have contributed to it.

7.5. RESOLVED:

That the general direction of travel taken in the Scrutiny Improvement Review, alongside the recommendations made, be agreed.

7.6. ACTIONS:

a) That a Task and Finish Group be established to look at the recommendations in detail.

8. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF POLICY AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY IN 2022-2023

8.1. The Commission received a summary of the draft Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in 2022-2023 from the Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor.

8.2. The Commission stated the report was one of fact and extremely useful.

8.3. RESOLVED:

That the Commission approved the draft Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in 2022-2023.

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

9.1. The Commission reviewed the work programme for the 2023-24 municipal year and discussed how it is a flexible and adjustable document which should reflect issues and events which occur in between meeting dates.

9.2. The Commission was informed by the Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison that the 'Scrutiny Improvement Progress' item on each of the proposed agendas is subject to developments and the Commission can decide closer to the time of the meeting date whether they would like to see an update or not.

The meeting ended at 19:34.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____