



City of Westminster

Committee Agenda

Title: **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

Meeting Date: **Thursday 22 June, 2023**

Time: **6.30pm**

Venue: **Rooms 18.01-03, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP**

Members: **Councillors:**
Concia Albert
Lorraine Dean
Paul Fisher
Tim Mitchell
Angela Piddock (Chair)
Mark Shearer
Jason Williams



Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion Part 1 of the Agenda.

Admission to the public gallery is by ticket, issued from the ground floor reception at City Hall from 6.00pm. If you have a disability and require any special assistance please contact the Committee Officer (details listed below) in advance of the meeting.

If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Officer, Clare O'Keefe, Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor. Email: cokeefe@westminster.gov.uk

Corporate Website: www.westminster.gov.uk

Note for Members: Members are reminded that Officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and Members are welcome to raise questions in advance of the meeting. With regard to item 2, guidance on declarations of interests is included in the Code of Governance; if Members and Officers have any particular questions they should contact the Head of Legal & Democratic Services in advance of the meeting please.

AGENDA

PART 1 (IN PUBLIC)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

To elect a Chair of the Committee. The Majority Group have nominated Councillor Angela Piddock. No other nominations have been received. Any Member may nominate any other Member to Chair in advance of and at the meeting itself.

This item will be conducted by the Committee Clerk.

2. MEMBERSHIP

To note any changes to the membership.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations by Members and Officers of the existence and nature of any pecuniary interests or any other significant interest in matters on this agenda.

4. MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2023.

(Pages 5 - 10)

5. POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATES

To receive verbal updates from the Chairs of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

To receive and consider an update from the Chief Executive of the Council.

(Pages 11 - 14)

7. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

To note the Scrutiny Improvement Review report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and discuss the general direction in how the Council may respond to the recommendations made.

(Pages 15 - 56)

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

(Pages 57 - 76)

To comment on and approve the draft Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in the 2022-2023 municipal year.

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

(Pages 77 - 86)

To discuss and shape the Commission's work programme for the municipal year 2023-2024.

**Stuart Love
Chief Executive
14 June 2023**

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CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Wednesday 3rd May, 2023**, Hybrid, MS Teams and Rooms 18.01-03, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

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

Also Present: Councillor Adam Hug (Leader of the Council), Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Lee Witham (Director of People Services) and Clare O'Keefe (Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 There were no changes to the membership.
- 1.2 The Chair apologised for the unavoidable delay to the meeting which was originally scheduled for 28 March 2023.

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 26 January 2023.

3.2 RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 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 Children and Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector (CAPHVS) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Piddock. The Commission was updated on the following:

- Councillor Piddock was unfortunately unwell for the meeting on 18 April. She however did watch the meeting online and wanted to record her thanks for Councillor Scarborough's robust scrutiny of the Central and North West London NHS regarding access to mental health services in Westminster for adults.
 - It was noted that the closure of the Gordon Hospital is an ongoing issue with a wide-reaching impact.
 - It was understood that the report on the Council's response to Covid-19 was not ready for the meeting on 18 April for a number of reasons but would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee in June.
- 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:
- The meeting of the Committee on 9 March was noted as interesting because it was used for the publication of the independent review into the Oxford Street District Programme and Members heard from Mike Cook, who conducted the review.
 - Councillor Fisher highlighted the importance of challenging the reasons behind some of the less successful elements of the Programme, particularly around procurement and decision-making.
 - The meeting also covered a report on the impact of Covid-19 on Council finances.
 - Overall, Councillor Fisher noted, there were great questions asked by Members of both the Opposition and Majority Parties.
- 4.3 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:
- The meeting held on 25 April was noted as a productive meeting which first discussed the busking consultation and involving ward Councillors in that consultation.
 - Members also examined measures to discourage engine idling, dockless bikes and discussions with various companies who provide dockless bikes.
 - In addition, the next steps on school streets, including the successful trials and future rollout and the Waste Action Squad pilot scheme and their work across the City was discussed.
- 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 Committee held an extraordinary Call-In meeting which reviewed the Cabinet Member Decision on 'Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position', and, in particular, homes for intermediate rent and segregation of tenures.
 - Recent meetings of the Committee have focused on temporary accommodation meeting the needs of homeless households, points in

housing procedures, rough sleeping and Councillors being encouraged to attend street counts.

- Further, the meetings have discussed Green Bonds, Green Doctors, service charges for leaseholders, repairs (including damp and mould), as well as security and anti-social behaviour.

5 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL UPDATE

5.1 The Commission received an update from the Leader of the Council on forthcoming and current issues. The Leader responded to questions on the following topics:

- Reform of business rates; whether the ongoing discussions with central government are productive and responsive to the City Council's needs.
- Candy stores enforcement; how far the Council can go with closing these down and tackling the systemic issue beyond disruption tactics so positive economic growth can take place.
- Candy stores across Westminster; whether candy stores across Westminster are being targeted, not just those on or around Oxford Street, and if there are adequate resources for enforcement action to happen across the City.
- Property ownership; the focus of the Campaign Against Dirty Money on company ownership structures in pockets of the City is welcomed and joint working should be encouraged against those who buy property with illicit funds. Working with MPs will shine a light on these issues.
- Rent Support Fund comparisons; how this scheme compares to other London boroughs and if other local authorities also use this targeted funding for those who fall outside of eligibility of main government benefits.
- Rent Support Fund; the funds which have been allocated to the scheme, whether the scheme will be topped up with additional funds and where the funds are coming from to allow the scheme to operate.
- Support for secondary schools' free school meals; clarity was requested on the mechanisms to provide support to secondary schools for free school meals as efficiently as possible.
- Long-term empty residential properties scheme; the powers and resources available to the Council and those in the remit of other bodies, the language used around foreign investors and their rights as property owners, the scale and costings of the scheme and what it aims to achieve.
- Memorial to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; the process for setting out appropriate places to memorialise HM and how the process ought to be a whole-borough exercise with resident engagement and cross-party discussions.
- Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan; the information which is to be communicated to residents and the Audit and Performance Committee.
- Communication with ward Councillors; ensuring that ward Councillors are routinely informed of schemes and consultations, for example, when appropriate, rather than at the last hour or not at all.
- Administration of funds; in whose remit it is to administer packages of support, such as the Rent Support Fund and other hardship funds.

- Out-of-borough residents; ensuring that those residents who live out-of-borough are receiving the correct and proper support from hardship funds, including recognising the burden on children who travel from out-of-borough into Westminster to attend school and the schools who are struggling with the administration of this.
- Leaseholders; there are increasing amounts of leaseholders seeking help but often do not qualify for the current hardship funds available to others who are also struggling but in different situations. Also mentioned was Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and whether the Council has had conversations with them about Section 21 and raising the local housing allowance.

5.2 The Commission congratulated the Leader of the Council on the launch of the Campaign Against Dirty Money and the progress made since the launch, especially considering the impact this has in the City.

5.3 The Commission also noted the overwhelming support which has been fed back to ward Councillors about the Cost-of-Living support funds, including the free school meals initiative. The Commission expressed pride in being part of a borough that has achieved making people's lives easier in difficult times.

5.4 **ACTIONS:**

1. That the Commission will receive a briefing from the Bi-Borough Director of Education on the mechanisms to provide support for secondary schools.
2. That the Commission be provided with information relating to the Rent Support Fund, including: the amount of funds allocated, if additional funds will top the scheme up and where the funds are coming from.
3. That the Commission will receive information regarding reporting on the Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan, including what will be presented to the Audit and Performance Committee.

6 **WORKFORCE UPDATE**

6.1 The Commission received an overview of the Workforce Update report from Lee Witham (Director of People Services) with input from Stuart Love (Chief Executive). Lee Witham, along with Stuart Love, responded to questions on the following topics:

- Grievance statistics; the absence of these in the report and the data being scrutinised at the Audit and Performance Committee on 23 February during the Ethical Standards item.
- Staff locations and London Weighting; the numbers of staff living out of borough, the focus on recruiting Westminster residents to work at the Council, the reasons for paying staff London Weighting if they live outside of London and mainly work from home.
- Reducing temporary and agency staff; the efforts that have been made to reduce temporary and agency staff on the Council workforce and the results of this effort.

- Respect and Dignity (inappropriate behaviour at work, bullying and harassment); the satisfaction rates with how their cases have been dealt with for those who have reported this.
- Leadership; the impact that Councillors and Senior Officers have on setting the tone of the Council, especially in terms of conduct and zero tolerance of inappropriate behaviour.
- Presence in communities; the importance of Officers being out and about in the community and engaging with residents and stakeholders, including the value of adequate resourcing to be able to do this.
- Community Thursdays; the positive changes that have been made with this scheme and the difficulties that can arise when dealing with lessees and communal repairs as opposed to Council tenants.
- Grievance procedures; the time it takes to deal with grievances is often lengthy and, especially given the growth in complaints about inappropriate behaviour at work, these should be dealt with properly but at a quicker pace than current practice.
- Grievance support; the assistance in place to help both parties who are going through grievance procedures.
- Staff demographics; the percentage of those working in the care sector who are women, and the positive increase in the numbers of people from the Global Majority on the Council workforce and what the contributing factors towards this are.
- Survey benchmarks; the local government benchmark used by People Insight and how it is formulated, what it consists of, the other local authorities used, and whether the benchmark is valuable and credible considering that less local authorities are carrying out staff surveys.
- Confidence in a good service; whether a free text field can be added to the next staff survey to clarify what survey-takers are thinking of when they refer to the 'If I was a member of the public contacting the Council, I would be confident of a good service' statement as current results are not easy to reconcile with public perception noted in the City Survey.
- Collaboration; the importance of having regular sessions with staff to improve processes and teams working in mental or physical silos.
- Career progression and development; the value in providing opportunities for career progression, investment in apprentices and development, keeping on top of career trends and thinking about future trends in workplaces. In addition, the importance of reviewing the approach to the current Seasonal Conversations which helps inform personal development.
- Data; the usefulness of data looking at length of service, turnover and sickness.
- Local Government Association data and staff pay levels across London boroughs.
- The positive number of disabled percentages in the Council workforce.

6.2 The Commission commended Lee Witham for a detailed and well-presented report. It was noted that there has been a plethora of good work that has been undertaken to improve the workforce and it was stressed that it is great to hear improvements are still being made.

6.3 ACTIONS:

1. That the Commission will receive grievance statistics in the next Workforce Update report as well as data regarding length of service, turnover and sickness.
2. That the Commission will be provided with current numbers of temporary and agency staff on the Council workforce.
3. That the Staff Engagement scores broken down by length of service of staff will be shared with the Commission.
4. That the Head of People Services will consider adding to the Staff Survey, for those who have reported inappropriate behaviour at work, bullying and harassment, a satisfaction rating on how their grievance has been dealt with.
5. That the Head of People Services will consider adding to the Staff Survey a free text option for those who are responding to the statement 'If I was a member of the public contacting the Council, I would be confident of a good service'.
6. That the Head of People Services will provide a list of local authorities who make up the local government benchmark used by People Insight.

7 WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

7.1 The Commission reviewed the work programme for the 2023-24 municipal year and discussed the following:

- That the Future of Westminster Commission item, which will look at the recommendations taken by the Executive, scheduled for June will instead be examined by the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committees first.
- The Scrutiny Improvement Updates will be written updates throughout the year unless there is something that the Commission needs to approve or discuss.
- That the Commission will be kept informed of all developments concerning the work programme.

The meeting ended at 21:04.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____



City of Westminster

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

Date: 22 June 2023
Classification: General Release
Title: Chief Executive's Update
Report of: Stuart Love, Chief Executive

1. Night Stars volunteers arrest by Metropolitan Police

- 1.1. On Saturday 6 May, three of the Council's Night Stars volunteers were arrested by the Metropolitan Police's Territorial Support Group on suspicion of intent to disrupt the Coronation proceedings. The volunteers were carrying rape alarms which are part of the kit they take on patrol to assist vulnerable people on a night out. They were detained for almost 15 hours before being released, and despite providing information that they were volunteering on behalf of the Council.
- 1.2. The Council has met with local BCU representatives as well as the responsible deputy commissioner and his assistant to discuss the issues surrounding the arrests.
- 1.3. The three arrested volunteers were provided with ongoing support from the Council staff in City Wide Operations and Policy and they were encouraged to access the Council's Employee Assistance Programme for extra support.
- 1.4. Following the incident, a full review of the processes and arrangements to support the Night Stars service was undertaken, which was used to inform a service improvement plan, the implementation of which is monitored fortnightly.
- 1.5. Many of the actions have already been completed, with an updated risk assessment produced, improved arrangements for Night Stars to sign-on and sign-off with the PP&L Duty Leader and shared with the BCU Operations mailbox. Other actions, including updated handbooks for volunteers and the development of a volunteer steering group are also underway.

2. Asylum seeker protest in Pimlico

- 2.1. Council officers were notified in the early hours of Thursday 1 June by a City Inspectors that forty asylum seekers were on the street in protest after being moved to a hotel in Pimlico by the Home Office, where they had been asked to share four to a room.
- 2.2. This required council outreach and emergency response staff to support the group, with contact between the Council and the Home Office about the emerging incident only taking place at the Council's instigation on the following day.
- 2.3. The Leader wrote to the Home Secretary on Thursday evening asking for clarification from the Home Office and that the lack of communication to the local authority in regard to this incident was not acceptable. On Friday evening the Home Office reverted its position and agreed that the asylum seekers could share two to a room, as they had done at their previous accommodation.
- 2.4. Although the council was aware through regular engagement with the Home Office in the months prior that the hotel was being used to accommodate asylum seekers, there was no notification that forty people would arrive on that date nor that they had refused the conditions set by the Home Office and were consequently on the street.
- 2.5. The poor management of the transition between accommodation and subsequent action by the Home Office caused significant disruption to the local community as well as placing the asylum seekers at risk.

3. Internal events: Muslim History Month, Windrush 75, Pride

- 3.1. The Council is supporting and facilitating Pride in London by working closely with Pride in London and their event production company to provide advice and guidance during the event planning process, whilst also balancing the impacts with our experience and local knowledge of the event footprint. Multiple agencies including the Police, GLA, TfL and blue light services are involved in the operation planning, and the Council supports with includes road closure planning, resident and business liaison, licensing requirements, cleansing, parking, and use of the Council's parks.
- 3.2. Officers from the City Promotions, Events and Filming team work across the event weekend- some based on street and others within the multi-agency event control room. The Council also has an entry in the Pride parade, which is organised by the Rainbow Network, which the Lord Mayor usually attends as well as cabinet members. The Westminster Rainbow Network will be attending Pride with the Pride Network in RBKC and Unison with floats.

- 3.3. May was International Muslim History Month which an opportunity to learn and celebrate the accomplishments of Muslim men and women. As a culturally diverse organisation, the Council have celebrated International Muslim History Month for the very first time this year to create amazing opportunities for colleagues to discover Muslim history in Westminster and the UK.
- 3.4. The Multifaith staff network organised a series of events such as a walking tour to discover Muslim History in Britain; a celebration event with the Muslim in Leadership Foundation to celebrate and raise awareness of Muslim in leadership roles; and hosted the Media & Public Relations Manager of London Central Mosque on Loop Live to speak about the mosque's history and its importance to Westminster.
- 3.5. This month the Council is marking the 75th anniversary of the Empire Windrush's arrival to the UK. The Global Majority Staff Network, together with colleagues across departments, are working in partnership with Westminster UNISON and the Windrush Caribbean Film Festival to host a film premiere that celebrates the contributions of the Windrush generation on 22 June.

4. Disability Confident Leader

- 4.1. The Council has achieved Disability Confident Leader status; the third London borough to achieve this thanks to the challenge to become more inclusive from the Unions, Able Network, Staff Networks, and staff across the Council.
- 4.2. Disability Confident is a government scheme to attract, recruit, retain those with disabilities and health conditions and to help organisations to think differently about them. All organisations start at level 1 and progress through the scheme at their own pace.
- 4.3. The first two levels focus on inclusive and accessible recruitment and the actions organisations are taking. The Leader status demonstrates the commitment to taking an active role in encouraging and helping other employers on their journey to becoming Disability Confident.

5. Ethical Care Charter

- 5.1. The Council has now signed UNISON's Ethical Care Charter following a ceremony in City Hall. The charter highlights the value that the council places on staff who deliver care and those who receive it and sets out the intention to better support both care workers as well as the people they look after.

- 5.2. Signing the charter is a key deliverable within the Council's Fairer Westminster strategy setting high employment standards for care workers resulting in better working conditions for them to provide higher quality, more dignified care.

6. Lift operations at City Hall

- 6.1. Lift operations were affected at City Hall from 2 to 8 June with only one functioning lift for that period. Council staff with a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) or who would not be able to use the stairs in the event of an evacuation of the building were advised to work from home or from another council building, with business continuity processes activated.
- 6.2. Engineering surveys were undertaken over the course of the week to enable re-certification of the lifts enabling them to be brought back into use. There will be some weekend remedial work to replace lift cables over the next 8 weeks. It is envisaged this will happen from Friday evening to Sunday throughout July and into August.
- 6.3. The building management of City Hall sits with Avison Young (AY) who look after the common parts for both the Council and Parliamentary Estates.



Westminster Scrutiny Commission

Date:	22 June 2023
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Council Response to the Scrutiny Improvement Review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
Report of:	Stuart Love, Chief Executive Parveen Akhtar, Director of Law and Monitoring Officer
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Governance Arrangements
Report Author and Contact Details:	Richard Cressey, Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison rcressey@westminster.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. In October 2022, Westminster City Council engaged the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (“CfGS”) to undertake an independent review into policy and scrutiny in Westminster. This review would make recommendations to ensure the function meets the high expectations of the Council, our communities and our partners by providing the most effective and impactful scrutiny function possible.
- 1.2. CfGS engaged Members and officers alike in a programme of evidence gathering activity which included a series of conversations with key internal scrutiny stakeholders, focus groups, observations of committee meetings and document research over a period of two months. CfGS were pleased with the spirit in which Members and officers engaged with the review.
- 1.3. The review has now been completed (see Appendix 1) and a number of recommendations have been made. This report sets out the recommendations made by CfGS and provides commentary on each of these for the review of the Scrutiny Commission.

- 1.4. Overall the review provides a set of recommendations geared towards making scrutiny at Westminster more impactful strategically, on policy making and in accountability terms.
- 1.5. The headline recommendation is to develop a vision for scrutiny at Westminster to provide clarity of purpose and underpin all other activity. Should this be taken forward, such a vision would guide how scrutiny both conducts itself in all areas as well as how the rest of the Council and partners interact with scrutiny.
- 1.6. The review highlights a cultural challenge to improving how scrutiny operates in Westminster. This will be for Scrutiny Chairs, Cabinet and the Executive Leadership Team to collectively own and drive forward, along with all Members engaged with scrutiny in Westminster. Such cultural change will take time to materialise and realise the benefits of, but many of the other recommendations are designed to enable such a change by, for example, focusing committee meetings on to areas of business where scrutiny input can have most impact.
- 1.7. The Scrutiny Commission is not a decision-making body itself and therefore and feedback received will be fed into the appropriate decision-making processes. For example, any required changes to the make-up and structure of committees, or any other changes to constitutional underpinnings, will need to be reported through the General Purposes Committee and onwards for decision by Full Council. In all cases, further work is required to scope and prioritise recommendations including engagement with both Groups.

2. Key Matters for the Commission's Consideration

- 2.1. The Commission is asked to:
 - Note the Scrutiny Improvement Review report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny; and
 - Provide general direction in how the Council may respond to the recommendations made, based on the commentary in this report.

3. Overview of Recommendations

This section sets out the full list of 28 recommendations made by CfGS (**in bold**) along with a short commentary on each (*italicised*) to assist the Commission in its deliberations on how to take the findings of the review forward.

- 3.1. **Recommendation 1: Develop a Westminster vision for overview and scrutiny. Define its purpose and goals of scrutiny using insights from this Review. Use this definition to underpin scrutiny processes, relationships, and work programming. Share the definition with**

partners, stakeholders, and the public to raise the profile and esteem for scrutiny.

This recommendation rests at the core of CfGS' recommendations as it defines the approach Westminster wants to take to scrutiny. Having a clear purpose and vision would inform wider decisions on how to operate each element of scrutiny, from committee structure to Member training and work programming. It would also provide a clear and unambiguous reference point for all Members, officers and partners to interact with scrutiny.

3.2. Recommendation 2: Develop, refresh a group working agreement for all members of the scrutiny committee – focusing on expectations, behaviours, and support for participation.

This recommendation would enable scrutiny Members to act more cohesively as one group committed to realising the vision and purpose of scrutiny. It would also provide an opportunity to emphasise the independent, apolitical underpinnings of the scrutiny system as well as the expectations in terms of Members providing strong, constructive scrutiny leadership. This would be in line with Government guidance¹ on ensuring scrutiny Members have an independent mindset.

3.3. Recommendation 3: Provide development support and training for Officers across the Council to build, refresh and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose, and powers of scrutiny.

This recommendation focuses on developing cross-council knowledge of scrutiny which could be achieved via a rolling schedule of training, supported by outreach/bite size learning sessions by the Scrutiny Team. The Governance and Councillor Liaison SharePoint Hub is accessible to officers from across the council who can engage in self-led learning with the resources shared and signposted on there. General training sessions could be organised (either led by Council officers or external agencies such as CfGS) with more bespoke training to follow if requested or needed by specific teams who tend to engage more closely or frequently with scrutiny. Such training and development sessions could also help embed scrutiny's vision and seek to develop the organisational culture towards scrutiny.

¹ Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities (2019)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800048/Statutory_Guidance_on_Overview_and_Scrutiny_in_Local_and_Combined_Authorities.pdf

- 3.4. **Recommendation 4: Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not unnecessarily detailed and is understandable by Members. Specifically, consider the format, style, and content of performance management reports. These should be tailored to address the specific areas of focus to be considered by scrutiny.**

Sharing relevant, timely, information with committees can be meaningful if undertaken in an appropriate and effective way. Information can help support the development of key lines of enquiry, evidence gathering and the formulation of recommendations. This may be supported with better and better adhered to report templates as noted below, but could also be managed through the callover process where scrutiny officers and Chairs may provide feedback to report authors to ensure reports and information is focused and supports the scrutiny objective.

Also, as noted below, the report suggests that a standard approach to information briefings presented to the committee outside of formal meetings should be developed. Scrutiny officers could develop this to help reduce the amount of information, without purpose or potential for impact, being published for formal meetings whilst still ensuring that Members are kept adequately informed. A standard approach would also help to ensure that time and resources are being spent efficiently.

- 3.5. **Recommendation 5: Scrutiny committees must have ownership of their work programmes following advice from senior officers and partners. Final agreement of work programmes must rest with scrutiny members.**

The report suggests that work programmes could benefit from stronger, Member-led, work programming which should come from Members themselves taking ownership. Connected to recommendation 13, there is scope for all scrutiny Members to have more input into work programming, with potential for Members to have stronger links with senior officers and partners to facilitate this. This could also be an opportunity for Members to reach out to communities and stakeholders for topics of local concern which affect a significant number of people and may benefit from being scrutinised, in line with the scrutiny vision and purpose.

- 3.6. **Recommendation 6: Scrutiny committees must be clear about content sought in report and presentations. These should be linked to objectives sought from the area under consideration.**

This builds on recommendation 5 where it is advised that Councillors take greater ownership of their roles. Part of this is providing a clear steer as to what goes into content provided to committees to ensure formal meetings only include items on agendas which have purpose and impact. This goes

beyond asking for specific datasets or detail on service performance, and instead refers to the nature of the information provided in its totality which should be designed to enable scrutiny to influence decision making or practice. The report suggests Members should be familiar with topics under consideration as well as the contents of the reports themselves in good time before the committee. This would also mean utilising briefing reports, information sessions and pre-meetings ahead of formal committee meetings so Members are fully briefed on the topic and can shape their lines of enquiry accordingly to have the most effective outcomes.

- 3.7. Recommendation 7: Develop a 'house style' for scrutiny reports and briefings. This would ensure consistency of communication and reporting formats as well as help focus on purpose of an item for consideration by scrutiny.**

While there is already a 'policy and scrutiny' template for reports which are given to all officers, this could be redesigned and refreshed to enable greater focus. A new, updated, report template would encourage authors to focus on the purpose of the item and expected outcome of taking the item to scrutiny. A new report would also ensure that information is provided in a manner which is easily digestible and accessible.

- 3.8. Recommendation 8: Alternative arrangements to provide information type reports for scrutiny members so they can be considered outside of formal meetings. This should include signposting to council and partners key strategic documents.**

- 3.9. Recommendation 9: Remove the historical practice of Cabinet update briefings to scrutiny committees. If they are to be retained, then briefings to be limited to one or two challenge or policy development areas.**

Recommendations 8 and 9 are drawn from commentary that general Cabinet updates a) distract committees from more impactful work and b) encourage scrutiny into performance management of individuals and day-to-day issues which is neither how scrutiny is intended nor how scrutiny can make the biggest difference. The report recommends finding other ways to keep Members updated on day-to-day issues while saving time in Committee meetings for in depth analysis of either policy/service development or post decision scrutiny of implementation where much greater impact can be achieved. An alternative way for Cabinet Members to keep committees up to date on business-as-usual activity could be through a quarterly performance report aligned to the corporate performance reporting cycle to the Audit and Performance Committee, or other such briefings on ad hoc matters.

3.10. **Recommendation 10: A programme of development support for scrutiny Chairs to support them in their scrutiny leadership roles.**

3.11. **Recommendation 11: Skills development sessions for scrutiny members to focus on questioning skills, work programming and scoping reviews, financial and performance management scrutiny skills.**

Recommendations 10 and 11 may help Scrutiny Members to take more ownership of their roles by providing further opportunities to gain skills and therefore more confidence in the scrutiny sphere. Skills development sessions would ideally build on knowledge already learned through previous training and knowledge built up over the last year or longer. The direction of any such training should be led by Members and address those areas in which they feel they have room to improve.

3.12. **Recommendation 12: Ensure that there is a development plan for the scrutiny team which includes formal and informal mentoring and coaching. We have been advised arrangements are in place for this to happen.**

There are already arrangements in place for team members to develop within their roles and progress has already been made in terms of skills, knowledge and experience over the past 6-9 months since the team came together. Most notably team members are connected with scrutiny teams in neighbouring boroughs as well as long-standing scrutiny officers who can share advice and guidance. The team is now also taking a more active role than ever before in the London Scrutiny Network which provides an excellent opportunity to learn from other boroughs and informally network with experienced officers from across the capital. The next steps will involve formalising such plans and arrangements, and consideration is being given to continuing support CfGS can offer to the team as individuals and as a collective both in terms of training, coaching and mentoring.

3.13. **Recommendation 13: Place the work programme to the beginning of meetings so it can benefit from more considered discussion rather than it being a rushed discussion at the end of the meeting. In light of discussions at meetings it may be necessary to return to the work programme at the end of a meeting.**

At present the work programmes of the Commission and all committees are discussed at the end of meetings, as the final item, which has often resulted in work programmes either being subject to only a short discussion or not discussed at all. Placing the work programme item at the beginning of formal meetings would provide an opportunity for stronger, Member-led work programming; this ties in with recommendation 5 which discusses committees taking ownership of their work programmes.

- 3.14. **Recommendation 14: Strengthen existing collaborative relationships between scrutiny, Cabinet and Directors whilst maintaining the independence of scrutiny. Early and systematic involvement of portfolio holders and Directors would enable scrutiny to identify issues, trends, and topics where it can focus for accountability and impact.**

While the Chairs of the committees and Cabinet Members now meet regularly to ensure the work programmes are impactful, the report suggests that these meetings should be more structured to ensure key items are prioritised and that opportunities for scrutiny to play a significant role in policy development, for example, are not missed. Directors of departments could be brought into these meetings to ensure that scrutiny Chairs have a range of expert advice to help their agenda-setting.

- 3.15. **Recommendation 15: Mapping collaboration opportunities for scrutiny across a full range of local and system wide partners and stakeholders. This can then be used in the scoping of scrutiny reviews and the identification of key lines of enquiry.**

This recommendation focuses on Members strengthening scrutiny by collaborating with systems, other public services and stakeholders. By building collaborative opportunities, and gaining deeper understanding of changes and developments, Members could actively contribute to work programming and formulate investigations which are effective and impactful and serve to address issues across the city as a whole, beyond the immediate remit of the City Council. This is most often the case in health and crime/justice systems where scrutiny has a statutory role, but could also be applied in systems such as transportation, utilities, welfare or other major public sector-led systems.

- 3.16. **Recommendation 16: Strengthen the Member led work programme with a refreshed process that uses systematic scrutiny tools to identify and prioritise agenda items, key lines of enquiry and potential impact.**

This recommendation is strongly linked to recommendation 14, but goes further to suggest a more structured approach to work programme development. This is something that the officer team could work on with Scrutiny leaders to develop a consistent approach which links areas of investigation back to the vision and purpose of scrutiny at Westminster, while focusing on ensuring impact.

- 3.17. **Recommendation 17: Ensure cross-party pre-meetings are held (ideally) a few days before the meeting and led in a way that helps committee members prepare for scrutiny sessions by reviewing the key lines of enquiry and coordinating approaches.**

At present, Scrutiny Committees hold pre-meetings with Members of both parties invited, however, most of these meetings over the last municipal year were held directly before the formal meeting. Time pressures in Members diaries has often been the cause of this but there is significant benefit to holding pre-meetings. The report recommends that these pre-meetings are shifted to be held a few days in advance of the formal meeting to allow more time for Members to prepare, review key lines of enquiry and coordinate approaches. These pre-meetings should be led by the Chair of the Committee and run in a manner which encourages Committee Members to act 'as one' as opposed to along political lines.

3.18. Recommendation 18: Use benchmarking and share good practice case studies to promote examples of 'what good scrutiny looks like' to inform reviews and design challenge questions.

The core of this recommendation is to ensure themes on the work programmes are focused and topical. There are a number of ways that this could be done and the scrutiny team can work with Members to determine the best way forward. An opportunity for benchmarking could be sought from the London Scrutiny Network; scrutiny officers have recently approached the Network to establish an information gathering exercise to determine numbers, frequencies and structures of committee of boroughs across the Network. If this is a successful exercise, good practices in relation to scoping could be identified in a similar way and look beyond London boroughs.

3.19. Recommendation 19: Develop a protocol between Cabinet and Scrutiny around the role of Scrutiny in pre-scrutiny and policy development.

a) identify how and when policy development items come to scrutiny and how recommendations are embedded in Council processes and timelines.

b) Ensure scrutiny's input into policy development can be early and constructive. This will require scrutiny being given early access, information, and clear line of sight to new policy areas are in open discussion stage.

This recommendation is noted good practice across local government but is not something Westminster has ever established. It would further embed the principle of scrutiny playing a role in the policy development process and set out a consistent approach to guide collaborative ways of working. Although a protocol in and of itself does not change behaviours which will naturally be formed as the scrutiny culture evolves and Members and officers adapt to new ways of working, a protocol would provide a baseline.

It would also act as a point of reference for new Cabinet Members and new Scrutiny Members to aid their understanding upon taking up these roles.

Such a protocol should be held within the relevant sections of the Council's Constitution and would therefore need to be approved by Full Council on the recommendation of the General Purposes Committee.

3.20. Recommendation 20: Develop an approach for post implementation scrutiny.

This recommendation focuses on the ability of scrutiny to hold the Executive to account for the implementation of decisions, as well as assessing the impact of this implementation on residents and stakeholders. This strategic examination of decisions would require effective scoping to ensure this is carried out in the most efficient way and that scrutiny will be effective. If undertaken effectively, the outcome of this scrutiny could feed into learning and be applied to future decisions for similar projects.

3.21. Recommendation 21: Strengthen finance scrutiny through member development and through rigorous and early involvement of budget scrutiny activity where scrutiny is embedded and aligned with the budget process.

The report suggests that Members would benefit from more opportunities for finance scrutiny training, especially when the time comes to consider the draft budget each year. Early conversations regarding the shape of budget scrutiny over the next year are ongoing and CfGS states that it is good practice for the relevant areas of the draft budget to be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee (scrutiny of the draft budget has traditionally been solely the role of the standing Budget Scrutiny Task Group). The report also recommends that each committee could also carry out service-specific budget and financial performance monitoring each quarter, however, care would need to be taken to ensure that this work does not duplicate the work of the Audit and Performance Committee.

3.22. Recommendation 22: Focus on smaller sets of high-quality recommendations from scrutiny reviews.

3.23. Recommendation 23: Enhance the system for tracking recommendations over time – identify the impact and learning from specific recommendations as well as factors that produce effective recommendations.

Recommendations 22 and 23 focus on areas where the biggest impact can be made and talked about the outputs or products of scrutiny. At present, there are relatively few scrutiny products and discussions can tend to be interested but not lead to anything specific. Instead the review suggests that recommendations from scrutiny should be meaningful, targeted, and

made at a strategic level. Recommendations should also be clear, understood by officers and able to be measured. To measure recommendations, they should be able to be tracked to demonstrate and improve the impact of scrutiny, as well as ensuring accountability. There could be discussions held as to how useful the current format of the action trackers is and what amendments can be taken to make these more impactful and effective.

3.24. Recommendation 24: Use a self-assessment tool to support the annual review and evaluation of scrutiny.

In preparation of the next Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity, learning from scrutiny activities throughout the year could be noted and reported on as well as feedback from stakeholders. This would help scrutiny to hold itself accountable for the impact of the work it has undertaken, the use of scrutiny time and resources, and identify good practices and learning. A self-assessment review could assess scrutiny's alignment with the vision and impact for the organisation and community over the past year and identify areas for improvement. CfGS have devised such a tool which is publicly available².

3.25. Recommendation 25: Review the structure of Overview and Scrutiny in Westminster to identify opportunities to consolidate and integrate functions in the most efficient and proportionate ways.

3.26. Recommendation 26: Scrutiny of children's services (and associated areas) be separated from Adult Care and Health, possibly establishing a committee for each service area.

Recommendations 25 and 26 are two of the most tangible recommendations that could be actioned following this review and it may therefore be tempting to only focus on possible structural change to committees. Any structural changes must however take account of the wider recommendations, particularly those which are geared towards defining the purpose of scrutiny at Westminster so committee changes should not be the starting point.

CfGS have advised that Westminster may wish to consider a move towards a 'select committee style' model of committee, which shifts committees away from being defined in opposition to Cabinet Member portfolios and towards strategic, thematic groupings. Within this there is an inherent challenge in defining what those groupings may be but, in order to offer most opportunity for impact, it may be sensible to seek to mirror the Council's corporate strategy. There is a further challenge in keeping the number of committees to a manageable number both for officers and

² <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=scrutiny-self-evaluation-framework>

Members. This is particularly the case should the Council choose to appoint separate committees for Adults and Children's (albeit they could have strategically aligned subjects adjoined to them e.g. health and skills/lifelong learning respectively). In this regard, consideration should be given to the comments made by CfGS on the frequency of meetings. It may be desirable, for example, to have a larger number of 5-member committees meet four times per year.

Ultimately, it is for Full Council, on the advice of the General Purposes Committee, to make changes to the Council's Standing Committees, not the Scrutiny Commission. The earliest point at which this is possible is therefore September Full Council.

3.27. Recommendation 27: Ensure task & finish groups consider deeper explorations of more complex topics in the work programme.

This recommendation would allow Members to develop policy and examine issues in more depth than in formal committee meetings, especially as the work of a task group, or single member study, can take between four months and a year to complete. Members interested in specific subjects can work with the policy and scrutiny team to develop and carry out a task group or single member study. The establishment of task groups could remove pressure on formal meeting work programming.

3.28. Recommendation 28: Develop a public engagement strategy for scrutiny that can be embedded across all Committees through the work programming approach.

A public engagement strategy could be designed to increase the opportunities for policy and scrutiny to hear from and talk to Westminster's communities. In line with the Council's wider commitment to engaging more deeply with communities, this recommendation offers the opportunity to improve transparency and accountability and could also be used as a tool to promote more direct resident and stakeholder engagement in the scrutiny process.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Clare O'Keefe, cokeefe@westminster.gov.uk

APPENDICES:

1. Scrutiny Improvement Review – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

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Stuart Love
Chief Executive Officer
Westminster City Council
City Hall
Westminster

May 2023

Dear Stuart,

Scrutiny Improvement Review – CfGS consultancy support

I am writing to thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of the Westminster City Council's scrutiny function. This letter provides feedback on our review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its scrutiny process.

As part of this feedback stage, we would like to facilitate a workshop with Members and Officers to reflect on this review and to discuss options for improvement.

Background and Context

The May 2022 local council elections resulted in a change of political control at Westminster City Council. Westminster's Corporate Leadership, the Council's new-political leaders and main Opposition Group are keen to review and reflect on elements of the council's overall governance. There is a collective ambition to improve scrutiny through a collaborative review process by

- Getting advice and support to the Council in a review of its scrutiny function to ensure it is effective in providing a quality contribution in accountability, policy and decision making, delivery of council plans and overall improvement.
- Checking and testing that scrutiny arrangements and effectiveness meet the council's high expectations of democratic accountability and that decision-making and overview and scrutiny is transparent, effective, and impactful. It is determined to make its ongoing approach to scrutiny fresh, innovative, and bold.
- Wanting its overview and scrutiny structure to create the right framework to maximise its impact within its governance arrangements.

The Council has not undertaken a comprehensive review of its scrutiny arrangements for some time and considers that this review is a timely and valuable exercise – both to assess its existing practice, and to challenge it to undertake further improvements.

Westminster City Council currently operates an Overview and Scrutiny Commission and four Policy and Scrutiny Committees as part of its Cabinet based governance model:

- Children's, Adults Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Finance, Planning and Economic Development

It also has a Budget Task Group which currently meets in January each year and considers the council's daft budget.

The Council is also part of Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee arrangements.

The Council has not changed the arrangements for delivering its overview and scrutiny responsibilities for some time. It therefore has indicated that it would welcome ideas and suggestions for any structural arrangements that could be made, if any, arising from this review.

Review objectives

The objectives of this improvement review were:

- To review current arrangements, against the backdrop of the priorities in the council and make recommendations on improvements to the structure of scrutiny/overview, including training/mentoring, governance processes.
- To make recommendations on effective and proven cultural change regarding overview and scrutiny reflecting Members, officers, and partners.
- To offer suggestions on how the scrutiny committee structure, capacity and responsibilities might be strengthened.
- To make suggestions on the Officer support required based on the above.

In addressing these objectives, the review explored

- **Operating Culture.** The behaviours, relationships and mindsets underpinning the operation of the overview and scrutiny process. This will also include key areas of inclusion, diversity, and equality within scrutiny. The focus on the Council's corporate approach and level of support for scrutiny is also included;
- **Information.** How information is prepared, shared, accessed, and used in the service of the scrutiny function. To what extent is scrutiny supported and given adequate 'tools' to effectively scrutinise;
- **Impact.** Ways to ensure that scrutiny is effective, that it makes a tangible difference to the lives of local people.

We also considered these key areas as they are significant contributors to assessing the effectiveness of the scrutiny function and organisational culture towards the scrutiny:

- Information management, access and sharing;
- Prioritisation and focus around work programming;
- Local systems for assessing scrutiny's impact.

Evidence Base

Our evidence is based on what the review team observed, were told, and later validated, obtained from council documents, compared to good practice elsewhere and contained in latest guidance.

Conversations

In gathering evidence for the review, we arranged open conversations with members and officers in person and online.

Members included:

- All scrutiny chairs,
- All Cabinet members,
- Leader of the Council,
- Leader of the Conservative Group,
- Conservative spokesperson for Scrutiny.
- Two discussion groups were held, one with Labour Group councillors and one with Conservative Group councillors.

Officers included:

- The Chief Executive
- All Executive Directors
- Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison
- The Scrutiny Team (three officers)
- Cabinet Portfolio Advisors

Meeting observations

We observed remotely all Policy and Scrutiny Committees meetings held in February and March and the three Budget Task Group meetings held in January. We also observed some meetings that took place between June and November 2022.

Document research

Our desk research considered:

- Minutes of meetings, reports and documents considered at meetings.
- Reports of Task Groups and recommendations made from some scrutiny reports
- Elements of the Constitution specifically, the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules
- Scrutiny Work Programmes

The review was conducted by:

- Ian Parry – Head of Consultancy, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- Natalie Rotherham – Senior Governance Consultant, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- Sunita Sharma – Associate Consultant, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The findings and recommendations presented in this letter are intended to advise Westminster City Council in strengthening its approach, on the focus and quality of scrutiny activities and increase its impact and contribute towards a shared understanding of the purpose, role, and capability of the scrutiny function.

Executive summary of findings

1. Scrutiny has the conditions to improve and succeed

1.1 Overall, scrutiny could be more effective and stronger and that the essential ingredients, support, and conditions exist for this to happen. However, it is important to consider the current baseline and acknowledge that there is a history of unclear and under-performing scrutiny at the council. The operating culture currently demonstrates a lack of sufficient confidence and experience to have real impact. Therefore, even though there is a real desire to improve, its position in the council is not as significant or valued as it could and should be. There is a strong ambition though to improve which carries support from across the council.

1.2 Objectives for scrutiny are not always clear or understood and it is therefore hard to tell how well it is delivering a useful service to the council and residents. There is consensus from members and officers that the “inherited culture” and arrangements for overview and scrutiny need addressing. This change would need to be underpinned by support from across the council. This is a whole council endeavour.

1.3 There is a clear realisation and commitment that scrutiny performance could be more effective and productive. However, there are mixed levels of respect and value for the scrutiny role ranging from “no value at all” to “it does have some important influence.” Every conversation the review team held suggested a universal appetite for change and improvement.

1.4 Scrutiny work is having less impact than it should and at times it lacks sufficient focus on strategic issues. There is strong recognition that work programming across all the policy and scrutiny committees needs to be focussed and aligned to the council’s priorities with flexibility to consider emerging areas of concerns, especially those arising from residents.

1.5 Scrutiny members work to ensure any recommendations arising from their work is evidenced based and can be monitored through improvements to policy making and service performance. We detected a concern that committees lose sight of and are unable to adequately track their efforts or recommendations made. We note that the system of tracking actions and recommendations has been refined which should address this concern.

1.6 Political and Corporate leadership are keen to support scrutiny members so that together the council is addressing its challenges and priorities from respective roles and responsibilities as well as enabling scrutiny members to influence and shape policies as they are being developed through alignment of the scrutiny work programme and Forward Plan.

1.7 There is recognition that since the change of political control, newly elected members have been appointed to chair and lead scrutiny. This can be a positive, as fresh ideas and rejuvenation can outweigh any temporary lack of experience. Our assessment is that they have increased confidence in their roles but may need ongoing support to ensure they

acquire more essential skills and experience relating to their scrutiny roles, especially those relating to questioning and probing. Newly elected councillors generally are also rapidly increasing their knowledge about the council, its services, the opportunities, and challenges faced, through their scrutiny roles.

1.8 Experienced members from both political groups acknowledged that some challenges which could negatively impact on the conditions for successfully scrutiny are historical.

1.9 Members and officers are keen to explore ways in which scrutiny can better engage with residents and the community.

1.10 Some scrutiny members do make effort to be strategic and focus on the areas of importance, although in practice this sometimes falls short of this ambition. Scrutiny can very often become a 'conversation', an information exchange or become too operational, parochial, ward issue, or detailed council performance focused.

1.11 This is balanced by those members who demonstrate strong scrutiny skills through their questioning, follow up and contribution to discussion and recommendations. Whilst these skills have been observed across all the committees, they are more prevalent at the Children's, Adult's, Public Health and Voluntary Sector meetings and the Budget Task Groups meetings.

1.12 There are missed opportunities for scrutiny to add value and to be an integral part of the Council's corporate plans and overall improvement. We note that the change of political control, shifting positions of influence and appointment to new roles means that experience of past roles is informing learning. For scrutiny to be more strategic, there needs to be change from both scrutiny and the Executive, to draw closer together to create a purposeful role and agenda without compromising scrutiny independence. If the council wants scrutiny to place more emphasis on shaping, challenging, and holding to account, then scrutiny will need the support and early access to information, resources and operate as an integral, constructive part of policy and decision-making activities of the Leader and Cabinet.

1.13 The Leader and Cabinet Members attend scrutiny meetings as contributors but are often not sufficiently held to account and constructively challenged. There is concern that Cabinet members do not attend Budget Task Group meeting resulting in officers being held to account instead. Cabinet members and the Leader express support for scrutiny and welcome challenge and accountable scrutiny.

1.14 Scrutiny leadership could be stronger through exercising the 'critical friend' role. However, the focus on busy and full meetings places an emphasis on getting through the meeting (quantity) rather than in depth scrutiny of issues (quality) or holding to account decision makers in a timely and meaningful way. Some meetings take longer than is useful or helpful in achieving outcomes.

1.15 The new scrutiny officer team is settling in and has started to implement systems for assisting Members in developing work programmes, managing agendas, and liaising with Council departments and external partners to generate reports, evidence, and information. The Team is also developing relevant professional skills and building knowledge and

experience to provide strategic advice, research, and support to ensure scrutiny members are effective in their roles. We note this is work in progress.

1.16 Further consideration should be given to increasing and providing additional professional scrutiny officer capacity (research and strategic advice skills as opposed to administrative support) within the scrutiny team. Due to the unique set of specific challenges faced by the Council arising from its geographical location, additional dedicated scrutiny officer capacity would enable scrutiny members to provide policy development support on key priority areas. The scrutiny officer team is managed by the Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison.

1.17 Recommendation making can be improved. We have seen little evidence of sufficiently compelling recommendations arising from scrutiny discussions. Requests for information, updates, briefings tend to be preferred. This may be symptomatic of the historical political culture as well as from members settling into their new roles or that recommendations are more likely to arise from task and finish groups as they get going. Scrutiny work must ensure that its recommendations will improve policies and services for Westminster residents and the wider community.

1.18 Follow up, monitoring and tracking of accepted recommendations against outcomes needs to be strengthened. This is a development area for both scrutiny chairs and scrutiny officers.

1.19 There is an opportunity to improve collaboration between scrutiny and audit. The intersection between scrutiny and audit can be strengthened through ensuring regular dialogue between audit and scrutiny chairs. Working together in this way will enable agreement on the issues that can be passed between committees, avoiding duplication, engage members of the audit committee on scrutiny task groups or in budget scrutiny. Members could carry out work to contribute to and develop the Annual Governance Statement and provide evidence on how scrutiny work supports overall governance. This contribution should be acknowledged in scrutiny's Annual Report. Working together in this way will enable scrutiny and audit to spread awareness of the respective functions across the council.

1.20 There are some barriers and practices that need to be addressed and Member development gaps supported if progress, which is clearly desired by the council, is to be realised.

1.21 The following key themes emerged from our review which will support the Council in its development of scrutiny:

- The value of setting out a vision, refreshing and asserting the principles and purpose of scrutiny in Westminster for Members and Officers.

- The nature of relationships between Members. Finding ways to ensure scrutiny can operate in a more collaborative approach to lessen the historical political environment and thus reduce any adversarial behaviours.
- Making the best use of scrutiny and corporate resource. To consider the scope and remit for all policy and scrutiny committees and flexibility to schedule meetings to get the most from scrutiny activities.
- Focusing on the impact and outcomes of good scrutiny that adds value and supports effective services in Westminster for the benefit of residents.
- Testing through scrutiny the impact of new policies or key decisions on residents.
- Embedding new forms of public engagement to increase the voice and participation of local groups and residents in agendas and evidence gathering.
- Earlier engagement by the Budget Task Group to scrutinise the budget and MTFS process and the important foundations such as: outlook and assumptions, risks, pressures, reserves, and alignment with corporate plan.

1.22 We want to acknowledge at the outset an appreciation of the positives that have been shared during our conversations. These include:

- Acceptance and willingness to embrace change and do things differently.
- Support for Councillors arising from changed roles and for newly elected councillors.
- A long corporate memory around scrutiny with examples of learning and lessons that should be learnt.
- Examples of historical scrutiny reviews that were felt to have had an impact with topics such as education, health. More recently, 'The Mound' as it reminded the organisation of the role and impact of scrutiny.
- A desire to learn from best practice elsewhere.
- A commitment from members to address issues that matter to residents.

1.23 From its current base, in terms of political support, member engagement, resources, council support and ambition, there is a platform upon which scrutiny could successfully develop.

1.24 There is a core group of members and officers committed to working together to build, develop and improve scrutiny. There is uncertainty though about how the organisation will support this commitment, encourage cross party working, ensure value and respect to scrutiny going forward. This will require strong leadership support from the Executive Leadership Team.

1.25 These positives are the conditions to take forward a refreshed approach to scrutiny at the Council. They offer a good basis for implementing change and working through the issues raised throughout the Review.

2. Developing a vision for scrutiny

2.1 Several of the issues highlighted in this report are rooted in a developing a vision of scrutiny at the council and being clear about the purpose of scrutiny. Commissioning this

Review in this first year of transition from the previous administration to the new administration offers a good starting point to revisit the principles and purpose of scrutiny. This would help build a shared understanding of scrutiny across the Council, its position in the wider local democratic process and governance system and, its role in improving performance of services to residents and the wider community.

2.2 By working together, Members and officers, could create a shared and agreed definition and purpose for scrutiny. This could promote and position the scrutiny function internally and externally as an important part of governance and improvement. It also boosts the parity of esteem for scrutiny alongside the executive functions of the Council.

2.3 Drawing on their own experiences and or understanding of effective scrutiny the most common suggestions for ‘what scrutiny means for Westminster’ were:

- Constructive challenge and accountability
- Effective cross party working, including having a chair/scrutiny leads from the opposition party.
- A focus on the needs, experiences, and interests of Westminster residents.
- Ensuring scrutiny makes a measurable impact and supports the development of more effective and efficient services that reflect Council priorities.
- Independent member-led exploration of key issues
- Exploring alternative approaches for service delivery and Council priorities
- Transparency
- Prioritising the most important topics for scrutiny
- Public engagement and public voice
- Strengthening local democracy
- Ensuring scrutiny has the confidence to prioritise the issues that are most important
- Working in a collaborative and non-political way to assess data and evidence.

2.4 As there is broad consensus in these views it offers a strong basis for moving forward with this approach. It will be important to also address some of the challenges identified in this report to ensure the council’s approach is able to tackle the more complex issues of working together in a political environment. The Council could draw on wider work on principles, practices, and statutory guidance to inform this process. It could benchmark examples of ‘what good looks like’ in terms of scrutiny practice in other authorities.

2.5 This can be particularly valuable for new Councillors and those who have limited experience of scrutiny elsewhere.

Recommendation 1: Develop a Westminster vision for overview and scrutiny. Define its purpose and goals of scrutiny using insights from this Review. Use this definition to underpin scrutiny processes, relationships, and work programming.

Share the definition with partners, stakeholders, and the public to raise the profile and esteem for scrutiny.

3. Culture, Leadership, Values

3.1 Whilst members and officers were keen to share ideas and ambitions for scrutiny there was some scepticism about the embedded culture which could get in the way of change. Some were realistic about the challenges faced based on experience to date. For members, these insights, observations, and suggestions were rooted in either their previous experience as a scrutiny or cabinet member or from experience gained through professional roles elsewhere which enabled them to compare how scrutiny policy development and holding to account could work.

3.2 Having a culture of trust, transparency and mutual respect between scrutiny and the Executive cannot be understated. This ensures that open and candid exchanges take place as well a flow of information and communication. Positive engagement between the Executive and scrutiny both formal and informal is vital to the success of scrutiny process and overall governance of the council.

3.3 We heard that the prevailing culture at Westminster is one which at best endures scrutiny and at worst is indifferent to it. There is a sense that scrutiny is not valued by the wider council community with some saying they are not clear about what scrutiny as a whole function is trying to achieve.

3.4 There is a strong feeling that the organisational culture cannot be open and transparent in a context where a shared understanding of the purpose of scrutiny and its value to the council does not exist. We heard numerous times from a diverse group of members that scrutiny is weak, ineffective, and that neither policy nor scrutiny roles were carried out well. Some went further and described scrutiny as a side show as the main act is Cabinet.

3.5 Majority of those interviewed provided examples of how scrutiny is overly managed by officers and questioning if scrutiny can be member led. This “over management” was described in terms of timing of issues on agendas, content of cabinet briefing reports, focus of presentations, some elements of performance reporting not addressing those areas requested by scrutiny and or complex information not tailored to scrutiny needs. Others described how they had encouraged members to lead scrutiny work, but this was not taken up. Some interviewees described how they were encouraged to keep scrutiny away from key areas of council business and “if you didn’t then it became difficult, uncomfortable”.

3.6 The role and purpose of scrutiny is not clear and needs to be better understood by members and officers. Some interviewees found it difficult to describe scrutiny’s purpose, role and remit and its place in supporting overall governance of the council. Some were unclear about scrutiny’s contribution to corporate plans and policies and the various ways in which pre-decision scrutiny could be supportive in addressing Council challenges.

3.7 Some pointed to meaningful contributions towards policy shaping but struggled to identify more than a few examples. We noted that these examples were about three years old.

3.8 In exploring scrutiny's effectiveness there was limited knowledge of its performance against that of other councils. Some stated that the culture of viewing scrutiny performance through the "insular lens of the Westminster way of working" led to the belief that scrutiny was functioning well at the council. One interviewee mentioned on joining the council, he had been told that along with other services, scrutiny at Westminster was excellent. As this view was echoed by others a significant number of interviewees also shared similar views, we consider this to be part of an organisational mindset driving a belief that scrutiny is operating and delivering good quality work. We have been told that had there not been a change of political control arising from the last local government elections then this mindset would have gone unchallenged.

3.9 This strongly suggests to us that despite some individual members and officers' best efforts that the council was either not aware of these of issues or has not been able (or willing) to address the conditions that has sustained a weak scrutiny culture.

Political behaviours.

3.10 We have heard how group politics impact at and on overview and scrutiny both under the previous administration and since change of political control. Whilst this is not uncommon in councils, the key question that needs addressing is how group politics affects scrutiny to carry out its role in a robust way and with an independent mindset. We heard scrutiny members only push so far in order not to upset political or organisational leadership or individual Cabinet members. It has been suggested that inter-group politics in the past directly impacted on scrutiny's ability to be effective. We would hope that going forward this will become less of an issue due to commitment to get best out of the scrutiny function and as scrutiny members settle into their roles. Scrutiny needs to be a safe-space where free-flowing debate and robust (but respectful) questioning can be held without repercussions.

3.11 We have observed an increase in the confidence of scrutiny chairs and members in their exploration and questioning of cabinet members since June last year to the most recent meetings. We have noted newly elected members demonstrating scrutiny principles at meetings and through their behaviours display understanding of the critical friend role. We consider this work in progress and would encourage these type of scrutiny behaviours across all scrutiny chairs and members.

3.12 Most conversations recognised that scrutiny in Westminster has an openly party-political dimension. This affects relationships and the ability to focus objectively on constructive challenge and service improvement. Cross party joint working can be difficult between Committee members. Feedback indicates that this is a major factor that could hold back scrutiny. It can also have inadvertently impact on co-optees who sit on scrutiny committees.

3.13 Observations shared by Members from both political groups and Officers illustrated acute challenges in creating a non-political and a collaborative environment. It is a credit to individuals that despite this context many work well at an interpersonal level and “behind the scenes”. This is something to build on to ensure cross party collaboration is driven by shared scrutiny outcomes.

3.14 It is important to openly address expectations around behaviours and ways of working together. We found that there is an appetite to address this issue and find ways to work together constructively. Much of this aligns with the principles and values spoken about by some members as part of this review. There is hope that new ways of working can build stronger relationships and a shared platform for constructive challenge and accountability.

3.15 For some members scrutiny can be seen through the lens of political challenge which can result in frayed relationships with colleagues and in reciprocated defensive behaviours.

3.16 Three underlying causes for these challenges were identified:

1. Members and Officers speak of a long-established culture of the politicisation of scrutiny in Westminster. This makes it difficult for Members to break from the pattern. New Members learn about scrutiny through the experience of current practices and behaviours - often feeling the expectation to replicate this model. By the same token, without a shared definition of what good scrutiny looks like it is difficult for Members and Officers to find the space to reach consensus on collaboration and constructive challenge.
2. The current balance of political parties means Members feel there is much at stake for their political aspirations and agendas.
3. The public context of scrutiny means that Members contributions can be readily shared and promoted through engagement and social media reporting.

3.17 This is not to say that the politics is unhelpful - it is the cornerstone of local democracy and speaks to the challenge of different values and visions. However, scrutiny works best when Members are supported to create a more neutral political environment. Political vision, challenge and opposition agendas are best located in other parts of the Council system.

3.18 As has already been highlighted some members work well across political boundaries behind the scenes and they need to find a way to transcend the party dimensions inside the scrutiny structures. On a positive note, we have seen examples of this in our observations. This includes building trust based on shared scrutiny goals that benefit residents. We feel some work to openly address these issues and create an agreement of expectations and behaviours will strengthen existing interpersonal relationships and extend to resetting cross party working. It is also essential to directly support Chairs to establish this culture in their respective Committees.

Recommendation 2: Develop, refresh a group working agreement for all members of the scrutiny committee – focusing on expectations, behaviours, and support for participation.

Officer Relationships with Scrutiny

3.19 Across all the officers interviewed some stated they had limited experience and knowledge of local government scrutiny and therefore relied on the existing culture and ways of doing things in providing professional advice, support, and reports to and contributing at scrutiny meetings. This also extended to their support to Cabinet members as part of assisting their preparation for attending scrutiny members.

3.20 Officers with experience of scrutiny elsewhere described the scrutiny culture at the council as “poor, weak, non-existent”. Some spoke about the collective lack of ownership at senior management level to ensure that the purpose, role, and principles of scrutiny were well understood across the organisation both at wider officer and member level.

3.21 Some pointed out that when responding to scrutiny requests to attend meetings and or prepare reports or provide information, there is often tension and increased anxiety about what information can and when it should be provided to scrutiny based on the prevailing culture and historical attitude towards scrutiny. In other words, limiting information to the opposition especially on sensitive issues. We have though seen early signs that this historical and culture legacy is likely to change. Through our discussion with Leader and Cabinet there is a commitment to reset and position the organisational cultural and political dynamics so that scrutiny’s worth and value as the formal check and balance to policy and decision making, underpinned by legislation is understood across the council.

3.22 Whilst being able to describe scrutiny values (openness, transparency, and accountability) which should underpin overview and scrutiny work in Westminster, interviewees struggled to provide scrutiny outcomes against these values. It is unclear from this how the council ensures scrutiny can make meaningful impact through its work.

3.23 In considering the experiences of working across two councils we noted the differences in scrutiny culture, style and approach. There was a desire by officers that they contributed in a way that was purposeful, timely and delivered robust scrutiny which influenced and shaped policies. This desire was described as “being useful to scrutiny”. Some officers said they were seeing signs that the political culture and mindset has started to shift which would encourage scrutiny to fulfil all aspects of its roles.

3.24 We noted that some officers don’t fully understand what ‘call-in’ is and its legal standing.

3.25 Those who work closely with external partners told us that whilst some external partners understand the role and powers of scrutiny and take their responsibilities to it seriously, they noticed that some officers do not place the same value on scrutiny.

3.26 The Executive Leadership Team has a key role to play in modelling scrutiny values and behaving in a way that drives performance of all members. We are hopeful that as discussions have already started as part of this Review and through considering its findings, that behaviours are, and will change to instil a scrutiny culture and supporting values at the council. It is hoped leadership from the ELT will drive this culture going forward.

Recommendation 3: Provide development support and training for Officers across the Council to build, refresh and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose, and powers of scrutiny.

Members as scrutiny champions.

3.27 Experienced scrutiny members stated that “scrutiny needs to be different”. They described efforts to develop and instil a different scrutiny culture – one that is fit for purpose for the present and future council. These members are the building blocks to take the best of the past, historical scrutiny work, positive patterns of behaviour into the future plans and arrangement for scrutiny.

3.28 From discussions there is some uncertainty about the role that scrutiny should play in influencing and shaping policy as well as when to undertake scrutiny and holding to account decision makers.

3.29 Observation of recent meetings has shown some good cross-party team-based working (intentionally or unintentionally). We observed follow through based on historical knowledge of services and past decisions, discussion of and probing on issues and pushing for other members questions to be answered more fully irrespective of which political group the questioner is from. We would encourage this type of team behaviour as not only does it increase collaboration on core areas under discussion but more importantly it encourages a focus on outcomes. Having cross party shared ownership of the outcome of scrutiny discussion is an important component of effective scrutiny.

Role of cabinet members

3.30 We have been impressed with the commitment that cabinet members have shown towards the scrutiny function in our review. Having been involved in scrutiny work prior to the change of political control, they have direct knowledge and experience of the function’s strengths and weaknesses. Ideas for improving and strengthening collaboration were shared with recognition that it requires support from key officers – specifically Chief Officers, Portfolio Advisors, Scrutiny Officers, Director of Law and the Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison. There is collective desire that scrutiny “has teeth, makes impact, makes a difference to policy and decisions.” We have observed cabinet members attending scrutiny meetings and paying a lead role in answering questions and a willingness to provide additional information and support. A good example of this was the recent call-in of the decision relating to the Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position.

3.31 The historical legacy of Cabinet member update reports dominating meetings adds to the lack of focus. The style of interaction is problematic as it comes over as scrutiny trying to performance manage the executive on day to day service based issues as opposed to holding it to account on decisions taken and the impact of these decisions. It is not clear what purpose these update reports provide other than to keep non-executive members informed and briefed on each Cabinet members portfolios. It should be noted though that some newly elected members have found these useful to understand what each cabinet member is doing. We encourage using a different method of informing and updating all members in the business of cabinet members outside of formal scrutiny meetings which would free up time to focus in depth on two substantive strategic areas at each meeting.

3.32 It is current practice for two cabinet members to attend each meeting. Inevitably the portfolio area of one cabinet member tends to dominate the meeting. We noted this particularly in housing related matters. This leaves less time for a discussion on the other portfolio. However, we noted a shift away from this historical practice to members preferring more thematic based discussion alternating between cabinet members at each meeting. We would encourage this development to ensure that only one cabinet member at a time attends a formal scrutiny meeting based on tighter area of focus and / or to alternate cabinet member attendance. For example, a more useful style of contribution would for a cabinet member to present on a significant piece of policy development they are initiating and inviting feedback from scrutiny members. There will be occasions though where it is not possible to restrict the number of cabinet members due to cross over between some portfolio boundaries - however the same principles should be followed to ensure best use of everyone's time through focussed scrutiny.

3.33 There is recognition that the council needs to develop an updated vision for scrutiny and work together to ensure that this vision is delivered through everyone's contribution making best use of time, focus on strategic priorities.

4. Information

4.1 Access to timely, meaningful, and relevant information cannot be understated. It is an essential tool which enables scrutiny members to be effective in role. It is also a basis upon which key lines of enquiry can be developed to support evidence gathering and in formulating SMART recommendations.

Reports and presentations

4.2 We noted that evidence and information is regularly available for scrutiny. Officers work hard to provide reports and material to support the work of the OSC and the P&SCs. This is reflected in the scrutiny reports which reference a wide range of data and evidence. It is important that this investment of time and effort is targeted efficiently. Cabinet members and Officers are keen to be at the receiving end of informed challenge from scrutiny Members as this can support strategic reflection and planning.

4.3 However, there are a range of challenges identified by Members and Officers that could be addressed by articulating the needs and expectations of both groups through producing a shared working agreement. These include:

- Ensuring there is regular, direct communication between scrutiny chairs, cabinet members and key officers to avoid ‘over management’ of scrutiny activities and risk of filtering out of topics, themes without the consent of scrutiny members and avoid misunderstanding of requests.
- Ensuring reports are focused on the agenda item and topic under consideration. Work programming and clear guidance on the scope of each scrutiny agenda item would enable Officers to tailor the information to the scrutiny focus. This includes Cabinet update reports produced by officers as they tend to focus on “showcasing positives from the department”. Cut and pasting from other reports should be avoided. If cabinet updates are to continue then the content should be Cabinet member directed and led, and restricted to the area of focus, concern, that scrutiny members want to consider.
- Recognising any tendencies for Officer support to shift towards unintentionally overstepping their boundaries through leading content and direction which is more likely to suit their purpose thus ensuring scrutiny remains Member led and rooted in local need.
- Managing the size of reports to ensure useability as well as offering additional support for any accessibility issues.
- Ensuring the timely production of reports and information to ensure Members have sufficient preparation and reading time.
- Ensuring Members are familiar with the contents of reports before designing their questions and review enquiries. It should be a clear expectation that Members have read reports prior to the Committee sessions.
- Coordinating information from a range of different parts of the Council in a multi-departmental way –this is partly dependent on the clarity of the scoping and design of key lines of enquiry.
- The practice of reports being presented ‘to note’, or inviting speakers only to share information, should generally be avoided. As a matter of general principle, items for information or updates should be shared with Members as briefing notes outside of committee.
- Utilising tools at Scrutiny’s disposal to receive information via briefing notes, webinars and keeping committee time for effective scrutiny.

4.4 With tighter scoping and being clear about the objectives sought from information requested would help the officers responsible for providing it. It would help define the most effective ways that the wider officer community can support the process and the needs of scrutiny Members.

Recommendation 4: Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not unnecessarily detailed and is understandable by Members. Specifically, consider the format, style, and content of performance management reports. These should be tailored to address the specific areas of focus to be considered by scrutiny.

Recommendation 5: Scrutiny committees must have ownership of their work programmes following advice from senior officers and partners. Final agreement of work programmes must rest with scrutiny members.

Recommendation 6 Scrutiny committees must be clear about content sought in report and presentations. These should be linked to objectives sought from the area under consideration.

Recommendation 7: Develop a ‘house style’ for scrutiny reports and briefings. This would ensure consistency of communication and reporting formats as well as help focus on purpose of an item for consideration by scrutiny.

Recommendation 8: Alternative arrangements to provide information type reports for scrutiny members so they can be considered outside of formal meetings. This should include signposting to council and partners key strategic documents.

Recommendation 9: Remove the historical practice of Cabinet update briefings to scrutiny committees. If they are to be retained, then briefings to be limited to one or two challenge or policy development areas.

5. Impact

Chairing, leading scrutiny, member development and meeting preparation

5.1 Scrutiny’s success is dependent on the right Members, with the right capabilities and attributes, leading and managing the scrutiny function. The four scrutiny Chairs have a vital task in leading their respective Committees. Ensuring that each build and maintains strong relationships with the Cabinet, Officers and relevant external partners is a key leadership role. Exploration of the role that chairs should play between meetings highlighted the need for scrutiny officers to offer guidance.

5.2 Chairs also lead on setting the working culture of scrutiny, helping it to set and uphold high standards of behaviour, engagement, and debate, ensuring good cross-party working. Although there is no single 'right' approach to selecting Chairs - the emphasis ought to be on selecting chairs based on skill set and capability and providing ongoing training and support. Given the dynamics within any Committee, skills to navigate differences to build consensus and collaboration will be essential.

5.3 Vice chairs have an important role too in their own right. In supporting the Chair to uphold and deliver the principles of scrutiny they are an essential component of ensuring that scrutiny standards and performance is achieved. When required and expected they can lead and provide direction on the Chair's behalf during meetings and outside of meetings. We would hope to see greater partnership and team working between scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs.

5.4 In addition to the areas highlighted above, the Chair and Vice Chair working together will

- be accountable for delivering the work programme
- meet regularly to monitor the work programme
- contribute to and develop 'team culture' amongst scrutiny members
- work closely with scrutiny officers
- develop a constructive 'critical friend' relationship with the executive and chief officers
- liaise with others to monitor the work programme and problem solve any issues, and
- actively look to improve scrutiny ways of working through considering best practice elsewhere.

5.5 We would encourage greater collaboration between scrutiny chairs to ensure that as a team they deliver Westminster's scrutiny vision. We would like to see the scrutiny chairs play a greater role in steering themselves and scrutiny members away from personal interest issues to a strategic perspective.

5.6 There was consensus from the scrutiny chairs that they wanted to focus on the impact of policies and strategies on residents, especially vulnerable residents alongside borough wide challenges. We would expect scrutiny chairs and members to be interested in for example falling school rolls, children placed outside of the borough, aspects of the council's transformation agenda, new commissioning intentions.

5.7 We heard of impactful scrutiny relating to a mental health facility's proposed closure. The scrutiny committee was challenging and held health partners to account effectively. Scrutiny members used their powers well and council officers worked well with the committee to highlight specific gaps of likely impact of the proposals and the committee is now continuing this work.

5.8 There is a recognition that members of the four scrutiny Committees need to support the Chair and share responsibility for the success of the process. Several themes were identified for supporting the chairing function:

- Setting the culture and expectations prior to each meeting.
- Instilling scrutiny principles
- Developing a robust approach to summarising the outcomes of agenda items from the committee meetings and overall discussion.
- Ensuring clarity of recommendations and actions from each discussion.
- Managing the time and focus for each agenda item including the focus of questions and the amount of time given to each item.
- Ensuring committee members share a group working agreement for managing their contributions and supporting the meetings.

5.9 A number of these themes can be supported by recommendations elsewhere in this report related to work planning, group working agreements and tracking recommendations.

Recommendation 10: A programme of development support for scrutiny Chairs to support them in their scrutiny leadership roles.

Recommendation 11: Skills development sessions for scrutiny members to focus on questioning skills, work programming and scoping reviews, financial and performance management scrutiny skills.

Officer skills and capacity.

5.10 Staffing and the capacity to support scrutiny was frequently raised during the conversations. The following highlights issues and ways in which the scrutiny team and other officers can support scrutiny to be effective.

5.11 There is widespread appreciation for the new scrutiny team who currently support the various Scrutiny Committees. They are viewed as supportive, approachable, and committed. They have demonstrated flexibility and creativity in supporting the Committees despite being new in role. But there is also a recognition that to be effective, scrutiny needs a range of support from across the Council.

5.12 We noted that a considerable amount of staff time is taken up administering the meetings rather than facilitating the strategic elements of the scrutiny function. Although support is drawn from Officers across the Council its acknowledged that this does not lead to scrutiny specialist support. As our review progressed and at completion, we have seen changes to staffing and expect this to be part of ongoing development. New staff members

have learnt the administrative processes of the Council and additional administration support has been provided to the function. This has created the space for the scrutiny officers to undertake more strategic advice and researching and drafting briefings type work. We would encourage ongoing discussion about how the professional strategic advice and support is enabling scrutiny members to achieve their outcomes and make impact.

5.13 There was considerable discussion about the skills set and experience of the scrutiny officer team. Experienced members were concerned at the length of time the organisation took to address officer capacity challenges over the past two years. They felt it was not a priority for the organisation. Some wanted the Review to note their disappointed at the loss of an experienced scrutiny officer. It is recognised that there was a period of turmoil with staffing due to a period of under resourcing. The Council has over the past six months moved into a period of rebuilding the scrutiny team.

5.14 There was some concern that members' need to have the lead scrutiny officer with appropriate scrutiny skills and experience was not taken seriously. We would suggest that there is scope within the existing team for this expertise to be rapidly acquired.

5.15 As a minimum we would expect specialist scrutiny officer team would offer:

- Establishing strategic relationships across the Council with Cabinet and Officers including the development of protocols and ways of working.
- Collating national and local research themes to inform scrutiny.
- Supporting the evolution of the work programme approach including scoping, agenda setting and key lines of enquiry.
- Facilitating public and stakeholder engagement activities to support the Committees to strengthen local voices and involvement in scrutiny.
- Using examples of good scrutiny practice and creative methods to inform local reviews
- Using research and analysis skills to draft reports, suggested questions, briefings, and recommendations
- Approaches using task & finish groups to enable scrutiny to explore issues in greater depth, reporting back to the main Committees for review and recommendations.

5.16 During the review several interviewees questioned whether the location of the officer team should be reviewed. Currently scrutiny officers are based in the Governance and Councillor Liaison Team. The Governance and Councillor Liaison Team is responsible for good governance across the council working to and on behalf of, the Director of Law, who in turn leads on all governance and scrutiny matters across the council. The Governance and Liaison Team in turn sit within the Directorate of Innovation and Change. The Director

of Law holds regular 1:1s with the statutory scrutiny officer to provide guidance and work through issues. The Council may want to consider whether the current scrutiny officer reporting structure is organised in a way that is appropriate to the risks and challenges faced by the Council.

Recommendation 12: Ensure that there is a development plan for the scrutiny team which includes formal and informal mentoring and coaching. We have been advised arrangements are in place for this to happen.

Work programming and focus

5.17 Each of the Committees has their own work programme. There is a planning process at the start of each year with a published plan that consolidates the work across the different Committees. For understandable reasons this process has taken longer in the first year of the new administration. A decision was taken by the Chair of the OSC not to establish any task and finish groups in this year to allow scrutiny members to settle into their new roles. The OSC oversees the work programmes of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees and provides coordination especially on areas that cut across more than one P&SC.

5.18 We observed that work programmes are overburdened with too much activity and full agendas focussed on reports and presentations. It is not always clear where impact and value is being added. From our observations and evidence gathering the OSC and the P&SCs need to ensure greater clarity about what they are trying to achieve or what impact they are aiming to make. Scrutiny cannot scrutinise everything, nor is it necessary to do so, therefore establishing realistic priorities based on clear objectives is essential.

5.19 Work programming is key to ensuring scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. Prioritisation is essential and helps the avoidance of duplication.

5.20 The best work programmes are closely aligned to the Corporate Plan, the Forward Plan, and a balance between internal and external issues. This enables scrutiny to focus on accountability and delivery issues.

5.21 We note that the current work programmes are interim plans to cover the new Council's first year in control. New work programmes are under development and will be finalised soon. It is important to stress that work programming is a dynamic and ongoing process. Whilst an annual work programming session helps to identify priorities and provide structure for the year ahead, there still needs to be flexibility in the work programme and take time to revisit the relevance of topics as the local context changes.

5.22 Members want work programmes to be strategic and consider corporate wide priorities in good time even on areas that the Council may find difficult. Several members stated that scrutiny should consider rationale and options around complex and/ or high spend areas to test out value for money against expected outcomes.

5.23 On a strategic level there needs to be more of an emphasis on seeing scrutiny as a vital part of council business and governance with clear ownership regarding its important role in improving policy and holding to account.

5.24 Consideration of pre-decision scrutiny activity would be useful as this has a crucial role in shaping, improving, and influencing future Council plans. This would require collaboration with and a commitment from the Leader and Cabinet to ensure earlier and timely access to information.

5.25 Expanding collaboration is a priority for all the scrutiny Chairs. Building collaborative opportunities into the work programme approach can enable Members to identify stakeholders and evidence to enhance their reviews. Some members and officers are already considering ways to strengthen scrutiny in adult social care, children's, engagement with health partners, and community groups.

5.26 Feedback also emphasised the ongoing training needs for Members to help understand changes and developments to public services systems like the emerging Integrated Care Systems and ways to formulate effective scrutiny reviews across the local and system levels in health. There is also a desire to increase patient and carer engagement.

5.27 Collaboration with systems like the Health and Wellbeing and Crime and Disorder is vital. There is also a desire to strengthen the focus on inequalities, addressing poverty, cost of living and Climate Change.

5.28 Collaboration can be developed by clear communication, creative approaches, mapping partners and opportunities as well as sharing the purpose of scrutiny in terms of impact and service improvement.

5.29 Arrangements have recently been put in place to ensure regular meetings between scrutiny chairs and cabinets members supported by officers. These regular meetings will provide opportunities for a stronger Member led work programme that focuses on accountability and more strategic areas as well as ensuring scrutiny maintains a 'watching brief' for emerging issues.

5.30 Feedback indicates that scrutiny Members can find it challenging to lead and contribute to the work programme. Without active Member engagement and clear objectives, the agendas can result in adding additional items simply to receive reports to note rather than aligning to Committee priorities and key lines of enquiry with the practice of Cabinet update briefings dominating.

5.31 Clear opportunities to strengthen the planning process for each Committee are available:

- Using a consistent work planning tool to support each body to create a balanced work plan that is manageable and relevant.

- Focusing on key issues where scrutiny can make a significant impact. Working closely with senior Officers, Cabinet Members, and strategic partners to understand the most challenging issues around Council delivery and outcomes.
- Identifying the areas where there are already robust forms of accountability and scrutiny in the Council and wider system – where possible avoid replication or where added-value is minimal.
- Highlighting the issues that are high priorities for residents and that reflect their concerns.
- Focusing on two or three substantive issues in a meeting to ensure impact.
- Linking the work planning to the scoping process for specific review topics.
- Embedding public engagement activities more centrally to the planning process.
- Task and finish groups.

Recommendation 13: Place the work programme to the beginning of meetings so it can benefit from more considered discussion rather than it being a rushed discussion at the end of the meeting. In light of discussions at meetings it may be necessary to return to the work programme at the end of a meeting.

Recommendation 14: Strengthen existing collaborative relationships between scrutiny, Cabinet and Directors whilst maintaining the independence of scrutiny. Early and systematic involvement of portfolio holders and Directors would enable scrutiny to identify issues, trends, and topics where it can focus for accountability and impact.

Recommendation 15: Mapping collaboration opportunities for scrutiny across a full range of local and system wide partners and stakeholders. This can then be used in the scoping of scrutiny reviews and the identification of key lines of enquiry.

Recommendation 16: Strengthen the Member led work programme with a refreshed process that uses systematic scrutiny tools to identify and prioritise agenda items, key lines of enquiry and potential impact.

Pre-meetings

5.32 Pre-meetings prior to the Committee meetings can help to revisit the purpose of specific agenda items, set objectives, align approaches, and focus on desired outcomes. Pre-meetings also offer a space to raise any concerns or relationship issues before these are taken into the public forum. Holding these directly before a meeting takes place is not ideal as it doesn't allow time and space for individual members to review, reflect and refine their thinking, approach, and contribution at the meeting.

5.33 Some concerns were raised about additional time pressures that pre meetings placed on members already busy diaries. Some saw little value in pre meetings as they didn't have a clear aim or purpose. Others saw the benefits as sharing and developing questions as well helping to build relationships.

Recommendation 17: Ensure cross-party pre-meetings are held (ideally) a few days before the meeting and led in a way that helps committee members prepare for scrutiny sessions by reviewing the key lines of enquiry and coordinating approaches.

Scoping

5.34 There are also opportunities to enhance the scoping process for individual review topics. This can support Members to prioritise the key lines of enquiry for their questions and evidence review. Scoping can also support the formulation of recommendations by establishing clear objectives for each review. Examples from elsewhere like holding scrutiny cafes or mini conferences can provide local learning for different ways to scope reviews and engage wider voices.

Recommendation 18: Use benchmarking and share good practice case studies to promote examples of ‘what good scrutiny looks like’ to inform reviews and design challenge questions.

Questioning

5.35 Questioning is a core component of effective scrutiny. Successful questioning not only leads to answers but also helps to build relationships. It is important to ensure Members can coordinate their questions and contributions with the work programme. Feedback indicates that meetings can lack coordination and engagement from all Members. The political issues addressed earlier can mean that Members can be at cross purposes in their approaches. This risks key evidence being missed or lack of focus for how limited Committee time is used.

5.36 Support to design challenge questions that highlight, and probe different evidence sources was felt to be beneficial. Members are interested to consider new ways to hear from Westminster’s residents to highlight aspects of service performance and quality. This engagement should contribute to evidence-based scrutiny recommendations.

Using members local knowledge

5.37 It is recognised that Members have strong knowledge and expertise around their own wards. This offers a rich source of local insight and information across Westminster. However, it needs to be used strategically. In our observations we noted several ward and

parochial issues being raised which although interesting and topical took up far too much time. The time could have been better spent on strategic issues and questioning.

5.38 Members stated that they often feel most confident in scrutiny when they can relate topics to this local experience. Supporting Members to use these ward level experience in strategic ways, highlighting connections to organisational contexts can enhance constructive challenge and accountability. It is important that Members and Officers can

work together to locate resident stories and testimony in the wider system and decision-making processes. At the same time, Members need to feel confident to signpost individual issues to other parts of the Council when advocating for their residents rather than waiting for or using the scrutiny process as they know that there will a Cabinet and or at Director at meetings.

Pre and post decision

5.39 Members are particularly keen to enhance their participation in policy development and pre-scrutiny in Westminster. Pre-decision scrutiny enables Members to engage with topics proactively. Recommendations can have impact when they influence and enhance decision making. Pre- decision scrutiny can contribute to longer-term policy development, overview, consultation design and forward planning. Pre decision scrutiny requires buy in from Cabinet members. Without it and as has been highlighted by some interviewees, scrutiny members have only been made aware of some issues when it is too late to contribute.

5.40 As pre decision scrutiny is planned during the work programme phase, developing a pre-scrutiny protocol with Cabinet is an effective way to identify these areas and agree a process for how these are brought to scrutiny. This can take place immediately before a decision, but this will place limitations on the impact that scrutiny can make. Scrutiny carried out well in advance of the decision will allow more time to delve into and explore the issues and likely impact of the decision taking into consideration any risks and measures of success.

5.41 At the same time, we feel that scrutiny would benefit from considering the impact it can make at all points in the decision-making cycle in the Council. During the conversations there was a tendency to see pre-scrutiny as the solution to enhancing scrutiny and demonstrating influence. This reflects local experience and challenges of agenda setting whereby items are brought to scrutiny at points where decisions are imminent or have only recently been made. Post-decision scrutiny is also essential, holding the Council to account for the implementation of decisions and assessing the impact on peoples' lives. This then feeds into learning and can be applied to future decisions. A work programme that balances scrutiny across all points in the organisational cycle is likely to be most effective – with Members able to scope the key points at which scrutiny can make a positive contribution.

5.42 A good example of this is the timing of the Budget Task Group. This Task Group is the scrutiny committee that considers the Council's Draft budget. It typically holds three meetings in January each year. In practical terms this leaves very little time to influence and shape draft budget proposals, savings options before the Council makes it decision on the budget going forward. We suggest moving the work of this Task Group earlier in Autumn and for it have its membership agreed at the Annual Council meeting.

5.43 It is good practice for relevant areas of the draft budget to be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee. For example, the children's budget areas to be considered by the Children's Scrutiny Committee. We also suggest that each of the scrutiny committees carries out service specific budget and financial performance monitoring tied to quarterly performance reporting. However, this should not duplicate the work of the Audit and

Performance Committee or the Budget Task Group. The Audit and Performance Committee could refer specific risk areas to scrutiny for more detailed considered. This will require supporting members in developing their financial scrutiny skills.

Recommendation 19: Develop a protocol between Cabinet and Scrutiny around the role of Scrutiny in pre-scrutiny and policy development.

- a) identify how and when policy development items come to scrutiny and how recommendations are embedded in Council processes and timelines.
- b) Ensure scrutiny's input into policy development can be early and constructive. This will require scrutiny being given early access, information, and clear line of sight to new policy areas are in open discussion stage.

Recommendation 20: Develop an approach for post implementation scrutiny.

Recommendation 21: Strengthen finance scrutiny through member development and through rigorous and early involvement of budget scrutiny activity where scrutiny is embedded and aligned with the budget process.

Impact through recommendations

5.44 There is a strong desire in Westminster to enhance the impact of scrutiny. Demonstrating that scrutiny can make a difference in measurable ways for local people. To achieve this, it is important to develop effective recommendations and track their impact. Many of the recommendations we have seen across all the Committees are of the nature of noting reports, asking for more information and updates, and giving assurance that scrutiny has seen key Council documents.

5.45 Key features identified during the review included:

- Focusing recommendations on a small set of priorities - this is more effective than having a long list that is not prioritised.
- Ensuring recommendations are clearly articulated and are focused using SMART approaches (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and timetabled).
- Testing draft recommendations with Officers to ensure issues are understood and are factually correct.
- Reviewing the impact and learning from recommendations over set time periods through regular agenda items.
- Ensuring a clear protocol with Cabinet to agree the process for considering and responding to scrutiny recommendations.
- Where applicable, to share recommendations with external partners such as health bodies.
- Collecting additional evidence and feedback to identify the impact of recommendations.

5.46 There is concern that responses to scrutiny recommendations are not actively monitored. Coupled with the uncertainty about whose responsibility it is to monitor and track the implementation of agreed scrutiny recommendations makes it difficult to assess

the effectiveness of scrutiny efforts. This offers the basis for more in-depth dialogue as recommendations evolve into more substantive proposals and challenges.

5.47 Each committee has an action tracker which collates actions relevant to that committee. These are updated and published with each agenda. A central tracking tool would support Scrutiny to maintain an overview of recommendations, enhance accountability and assess effectiveness of scrutiny. This could then link back to agendas for subsequent Committee meetings.

5.48 Cross-cutting issues such as the wider determinants of health and climate change have real impact on residents' lives and can extend beyond the remit of each Committee. Taking a joined-up systems wide approach to cross-cutting issues on occasions will be important. The OSC is well placed to consider these system wide issues leaving the P&SCs to focus on strategic areas.

5.49 It is important that scrutiny can hold itself to account for its work and impact. Modelling good practice can set expectations for ways of working to promote a culture of accountability for the function itself and the council. Applying the principles of challenge to how it uses its time and resources most effectively.

5.50 The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Annual report should include a report on any learning from the scrutiny activities.

- **Recommendation 22: Focus on smaller sets of high-quality recommendations from scrutiny reviews.**
- **Recommendation 23: Enhance the system for tracking recommendations over time – identify the impact and learning from specific recommendations as well as factors that produce effective recommendations.**
- **Recommendation 24: Use a self-assessment tool to support the annual review and evaluation of scrutiny.**

6. Committee structure and scheduling

6.1 The Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Commission (OSC) as its lead Scrutiny Committee and four Policy and Scrutiny Committees (P&SCs). Their role and terms of reference are set out in the Council's Constitution.

6.2 The P&SCs mirror Cabinet member portfolios. This is seen as problematic by some and would welcome scrutiny committees to be organised around key strategic themes. We agree as it would avoid the performance management style approach undertaken by scrutiny members of individual cabinet members at meetings, by shifting the conversation to core themes and performance areas and not the performance of individuals.

6.3 Many interviewees suggested renaming the OSC to the 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee'. We agree with the use of 'Committee' rather than Commission as it better describes its role as the 'parent committee' and avoids confusion with any other

Commissions established by the Council, for example 'The Future of Westminster' Commission.

6.4 We consider two high risk service areas, Children's, and Adults, being considered by one committee is problematic. It leaves scrutiny members on that committee with limited time to properly test and challenge assumptions and key risk performance areas. We would suggest that each of these areas is considered by two separate Committees.

6.5 Another key issue raised by both Members and Officers relates to the number and scheduling of meetings. Concerns were raised from all perspectives as to whether this was both efficient, proportionate, and captured opportunities to influence decisions. We would suggest looking at the number of scrutiny meetings in the context of the overall purpose of scrutiny in Westminster and the other issues identified in this review.

6.6 The current challenges identified were:

- Aligning agenda items to Cabinet and key partners decision making timetables.
- The use of meetings for activities that may be better delivered outside the formal public Scrutiny arena such as Member education sessions and briefings.
- Evidence of a lack of impact and outcomes from these agenda items in terms of substantive recommendations and action points.
- High demands on staff and some cabinet members both to support the meetings and to attend to provide information and presentations.

6.7 We suggest there are opportunities to coordinate meetings more efficiently to enable Scrutiny to focus on a smaller set of priorities. A more robust work programme across all the thematic areas to guide this work will help. This would help identify the core purpose and activities for scrutiny. A structure review would be able to identify the best way to deliver this. This may have an impact on staffing arrangements and organisation. A deeper consideration would highlight any potential to manage the number of meetings by merging and integrating elements of the current Policy and Scrutiny Committees.

6.8 As pointed out earlier on there is a desire to carry out pre-decision scrutiny which we would encourage. This will require scheduling meetings so that there is good time for pre decision activity to take place and provide the outcome of this to decision makers in good time for consideration.

6.9 We are aware that a work programme for 2023/24 is almost complete. We suggest that this is revisited in six months' time following any structural changes to the scrutiny committees.

6.10 Scrutiny members with experience of task and finish groups spoke positively about these as they felt they worked delivering good recommendations. The groups operate in a less formal way than standard committee meetings and this had benefits for the level of interaction and engagement with a wider group of people. Evidence gathering can also be

collated through different approaches for example through ‘scrutiny in a day’ to ‘challenge panels’ to ‘café’ style sessions.

Recommendation 25: Review the structure of Overview and Scrutiny in Westminster to identify opportunities to consolidate and integrate functions in the most efficient and proportionate ways.

Recommendation 26: Scrutiny of children’s services (and associated areas) be separated from Adult Care and Health, possibly establishing a committee for each service area.

Recommendation 27: Ensure task & finish groups consider deeper explorations of more complex topics in the work programme.

7. Public engagement

7.1 There is a general recognition that scrutiny needs to enhance its engagement with the public. We noted that this is welcomed and encouraged by the political leadership. This offers a positive opportunity to think about how scrutiny’s role and plans could support and contribute to the Council’s wider community engagement strategy.

7.2 An illustration of potential contribution comes from the Chair of the Budget Task Group’s blog to the public explaining what budget scrutiny is and its importance. A simple and straight forward way of both publicising the work of scrutiny and hoping to draw in interest in its work from the public.

7.3. This example of individual good practice could be scaled up throughout scrutiny. We are encouraged that public engagement was frequently raised as a goal for scrutiny.

7.4 Public observation and participation in Committee meetings through a question time agenda item is one element of increasing involvement. It is also proactively reaching out to local groups to gain insights and evidence to inform reviews and formulate key lines of enquiry. Scrutiny may also build questions around the efficacy and learning from public involvement functions into its exploration of services, systems, and decision-making.

Recommendation 28: Develop a public engagement strategy for scrutiny that can be embedded across all Committees through the work programming approach.

Thank you and acknowledgements.

We would like to thank the Chairs, Members of Scrutiny Committees, the Cabinet Members and Officers who took part in interviews for their time, insights, and open views.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Parry | Head of Consultancy

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Westminster Scrutiny Commission

Date:	22 June 2023
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Draft Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in 2022-2023
Report of:	Clare O'Keefe, Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor
Cabinet Member Portfolio:	Leader of the Council
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Governance Arrangements
Report Author and Contact Details:	Clare O'Keefe cokeefe@westminster.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

This report presents the draft Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in the 2022-2023 municipal year, from May 2022 to April 2023. The report provides the Commission with an opportunity to review the work undertaken by the policy and scrutiny function and its impact.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

The Commission is asked to comment on and approve the draft Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in 2022-2023.

3. Background

3.1 The Constitution of Westminster City Council requires the Westminster Scrutiny Commission to approve the Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity.

3.2 The annual report has developed gradually over the years from a general note to a more formal publication. As this report is currently a working draft, Members have the opportunity to comment on style and content as well as the work of their committees over the previous municipal year before it is worked up into a more formal document for publishing.

3.3 As well as reporting on each of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee's activity and

that of the Scrutiny Commission, the report also notes the work of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, use of urgency procedures and use of call-in.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Clare O’Keefe
cokeefe@westminster.gov.uk

APPENDICES:

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None.

DRAFT

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Foreword



Councillor Angela Piddock
Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission

It's been a turbulent year in national and local government. We have had changes of Prime Ministers, the death of a monarch and a new administration at Westminster City Council, all with the backdrop of a Cost-of-Living Crisis, ongoing conflict in Ukraine and periods of more extreme weather. In Westminster, the Council has been quick to react to national developments and proactive in pursuing its own ambitious plans as part of its Fairer Westminster agenda. The role of Policy and Scrutiny to hold the Executive, senior officers and partners to account is vital and allows Members to be a voice for Westminster residents and stakeholders.

I am pleased to present this report which contains a selection of highlights of the last year of Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster, from May 2022 to April 2023. Policy and Scrutiny Members have considered, investigated, reviewed, helped develop policies, and provided recommendations to improve the delivery of services and ensure that Westminster's commitments are being met. The wide range of topics and issues scrutinised throughout the year have provided opportunities to hold decision-makers, both inside and outside the Council, to account.

I am thrilled that Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster has been on, and is still on, a journey of improvement. We engaged the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny ("CfGS") to undertake a 'Scrutiny Improvement Review' which engaged with Members and officers alike to understand what works well with scrutiny at Westminster and in what areas we could take action to make scrutiny even more effective as an organisation. Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster had not been subject to an in-depth review for some time, and we were keen that the function meets the Council's high expectations and provides the most effective and impactful service it can for the benefit of our communities.

I am sure that the good work we have achieved this year will be built upon in the next municipal year and the journey to improvement will continue to ensure that Member-led scrutiny will play as full a role as possible in the Council as it can.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of the previous Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, Councillor Patricia McAllister, and Councillors who sat on Scrutiny this past year and commend them on their spirit of providing constructive challenge to the Executive, senior officers and partners to ensure that the Council provides the best service it can to its residents and stakeholders.

Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster

Scrutiny is a vital function to promote transparency and local accountability as it allows a politically-balanced group of local non-Executive Councillors to hold the Council's Cabinet Members (Executive), senior officers and partners to account. Scrutiny should seek to do this by being a critical friend, supporting the Executive to deliver its priorities in the best way possible and holding public services accountable on behalf of Westminster's communities.

Westminster City Council has four Policy and Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Commission. Following the administration change at the local election in May 2022, Westminster's Policy and Scrutiny Committees were reorganised to mirror the new Cabinet Member portfolios.

In Westminster, the Policy and Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Commission not only examine the work of the Council and decisions that are made, they also actively contribute to developing policy by conducting research and making recommendations on how services can be improved.

The issues which the Policy and Scrutiny Committees choose to explore are evidence-based and can include the insights of external experts and relevant community representatives or advocates. This approach ensures objective and supportive analysis of issues of concern or of plans in development to provide the Council with the reassurance that its policies are sound and that its services are meeting the needs of residents and businesses.

Committee Structure

- Westminster Scrutiny Commission
- Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Finance, Planning and Economy Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee

As noted above, there are four Policy and Scrutiny Committees in addition to the Westminster Scrutiny Commission. The four subject specific Committees each scrutinise the policy areas related to Cabinet Member portfolios and those Cabinet Members have to report and provide information to their respective Committee upon request. Each Committee is led by a Chair and together, the Chairs of all the Committees sit on the Scrutiny Commission along with three Members of the Opposition Party. The Commission investigates issues that cut across the work areas of a number of committees and provides an opportunity for Councillors to question the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. It also enables the Chairs to have strategic oversight of the scrutiny function to ensure it is being effective and making an impact.

Each Committee typically meets six times per year, and it is up to the Chairs as to how each Committee conducts its business, with some preferring to focus on in-depth reviews of topical issues and others favouring broader analysis of a range of issues. Chairs can also call extraordinary meetings throughout the year to hold additional or dedicated sessions on key emerging issues, time-critical issues or to bring all stakeholders together to better understand and evaluate an issue.

It should be noted that Policy and Scrutiny Committees are not in themselves formal decision-making bodies but they are supported by legislation to hold the Executive and partner organisations to account. For example, a committee can request that Cabinet Members, senior officers and external partners attend before it to present information and answer questions. Following this the committee can make recommendations that have to be acknowledged, considered and responded to in due course. Recommendations are then typically tracked by committees until they are either implemented or satisfactory reasons are given for them not being acted upon.

Task Groups and Single Member Studies

To develop policy and examine issues in more depth beyond formal meetings, committees can establish Councillor-led task groups. As part of this work, Councillors will often hear from expert witnesses, question key officers and Cabinet Members, consult with relevant stakeholders and conduct site visits. Depending on the subject matter and whether a rapid response or longer-term investigation is required, the work of a task group can take between four months and a year to complete which allows for a full investigation to be undertaken. Findings are then fed back to the Committee, or Committees, which established it and presented to the Cabinet Member or partner organisation for consideration.

An individual Member can also examine an issue in detail on behalf of the Committee, this is called a Single Member Study.

Last year, the Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission at the time made the decision not to establish any task groups in the first year of the new administration to allow scrutiny members to settle into their new roles. However, recognising that the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group is a standing task group, the work of this group was carried out. A summary of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, along with key findings and recommendations is set out below.

Work Programmes

Policy and Scrutiny work programmes are drawn up to set the agendas for the committees over a municipal year. It is the Chair, alongside the committee Members, who consider and decide the focus of the work programmes. Work programmes are recognised as organic and flexible documents which can be amended at any time if important issues arise.

Work programmes for 2022/23 were drawn up based on work left over from the 2021/22 municipal year and the preceding electoral cycle. The change of political control at the May 2022 local elections necessitated a review of these work programmes as the priorities of the Executive, and therefore the Council, shifted quite fundamentally. The work programmes for this year were therefore developed over time and sometimes were subject to quite substantial change from one meeting to the next. This is something that is expected to settle down in future years as the Council now has a revised corporate strategy "Fairer Westminster" and the administration is beginning to make progress on its objectives.

The proposed work programmes for the Policy and Scrutiny Committees for the 2023/24 municipal year were drawn up at the end of the last municipal year. The process for this included; consultation with the Executive Members of the Council, with the Chief Executive,

Executive Directors and relevant Heads of Service, following up on items and commitments from previous meetings, consideration of forward plans in the Executive Member's portfolios and challenges identified across the Directorates. The aim of this process was to culminate in work programmes which focus on: what is important; areas where performance might be improved; services which are important to residents; where scrutiny can make a difference and add value; proactively feeds into policy development by contributing to pre-tender considerations or strategy development for example; and uses the insight of backbench councillors to act as critical friend to services of the City Council and our partners thereby enabling good governance and excellent services.

Please visit the webpage for the relevant committee to find upcoming agendas and work programmes. If you have a suggestion for a topic that affects a significant number of people in Westminster and could benefit from being scrutinised, please feel free to contact the team at scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk. Alternatively, if the issue is related to a specific case then it may be best to contact your local councillor.

[Attending Policy and Scrutiny Meetings](#)

Formal committee meetings are open to members of the public who are warmly invited to attend and observe proceedings. Unless otherwise stated, formal committee meetings are broadcasted live from the committee webpage and usually held in City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP, 18th Floor, although we are keen to take scrutiny out of City Hall and into the community. Please visit the webpage for the relevant committee to find upcoming meeting dates and agendas. Other meetings, such as those of a Task Group are open to the public at the discretion of the relevant Chair.

If you would like to attend a Policy and Scrutiny meeting, or you have any questions, please feel free to contact the team at scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk.

[Policy and Scrutiny for the Year Ahead](#)

At the time of writing, we say thank you and goodbye to Councillors Melvyn Caplan and Karen Scarborough who have moved on to other roles. We also bid farewell to our former Policy and Scrutiny Chair and Chair of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Patricia McAllister and welcome to Councillor Concia Albert, who will be Chairing the Committee going forward. We also welcome Councillors Lorraine Dean and Ed Pitt Ford who are joining the Policy and Scrutiny ranks.

Furthermore, as also detailed in Councillor Piddock's foreword, Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster is on a journey of improvement. The Improvement Review undertaken by CfGS will help to enable scrutiny at Westminster to be as effective and impactful as it can be for our residents and stakeholders. The review engaged with Members and officers alike and a feedback report written by CfGS will summarise the findings and propose areas to improve, through evidence-based recommendations. The findings of the review will initially be presented to the Scrutiny Commission from where Members and officers will be able to discuss and decide what changes to adopt and how to make scrutiny more effective. In the coming months, there will be Member and officer development workshops to explore findings and recommendations. The process will be Member-led as Members, with support from officers, will be expected to work on and deliver aspects of improvement.

Lastly, the Policy and Scrutiny Chairs and officer team will continue to engage with the London Scrutiny Network, having hosted the second meeting of the Network in April 2023 and looking forward to hosting the next in July as well as furthering engagement across not only London boroughs but nationally.

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

What does the Commission do?

The Westminster Scrutiny Commission (“the Commission”) is the overarching body which is responsible for the management and co-ordination of the Council’s Policy and Scrutiny function. The Members are Chairs of the respective committees, alongside three opposition representatives.

The Commission has a number of important roles in the operation of the Council. These include scrutinising Leader of the Council’s portfolio and with this taking a strategic look to examine cross-cutting Council programmes and areas of policy which are of key importance to how the Council supports its residents and businesses. The Commission also has oversight of the work programmes of all Policy and Scrutiny Committees and has the responsibility of resolving any issues identified in the delivery of their statutory duties.

Membership (until May 2023)

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

Highlights from the year

The Commission met four times in the 2022/23 municipal year and received regular updates from the Leader of the Council on matters within his portfolio and from the Chief Executive who provided updates on matters of corporate interest. Through question and answer sessions with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, the Commission has reviewed progress on the Council’s key initiatives such as the ‘Westminster Against Dirty Money’ Charter and economic crime, raised issues around improving cost-of-living support for residents, and promoted the greater use of scrutiny in the Council’s Fairer Westminster delivery plan. In addition, the Commission received verbal updates from the Chairs of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees on the work of their committees since the last meeting of the Commission.

One of the biggest challenges to local authorities over the past municipal year has been the Cost-of Living Crisis. Westminster City Councillors approved a motion to declare a Cost-of-Living Emergency at a meeting of Full Council on 21 September 2022. During meetings of the Commission, the Leader and Chief Executive have responded to probing lines of questioning, of which the focus has included the emergency measures and whether funds are adequate, and that information is disseminated in the most efficient and effective way so that the most vulnerable residents, both in Westminster and placed out of borough, knew what support is available to them.

Alongside the high-profile issue of the Cost-of-Living Crisis, the Commission has been active in scrutinising and developing policy on a wide range of topics. One such topic was Emergency Preparedness Planning. One line of enquiry of particular importance was communication to

residents and stakeholders during a crisis, particularly considering the July 2021 floods where this was acknowledged as not being robust enough. The Commission also raised the possibility of emergency planning training for Councillors during crises and after; this was noted as an action and a session was held accordingly. Members decided that, considering the ever-changing environment of the 21st Century, the Commission would receive a bi-annual report on the Council's Emergency Preparedness Planning.

The Commission also fed into policy development with regards to the Council's plans to increase community participation. There were many questions asked of the Executive Director of Innovation and Change, including: consistent and demographically diverse engagement across the whole borough, the balance between Councillors exercising their elected roles and residents exercising their constituent roles, managing expectations, standards of consultations, timelines of schemes, languages used and benchmarking. The Commission recognised that whilst community participation would usually be a topic for the Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee, the Commission had spoken a number of times about participatory budget setting and community participation in priority-setting. The Commission understood 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 Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

The Commission also received an overview of the work of the Future of Westminster Commission ("FoWC"). The Commission investigated a number of areas under the FoWC including: engagement with officers across the Council, the scope of the different strands of the FoWC, priorities across the City, and holding public facing meetings. The focus of scrutiny over the coming year will be to examine the Council's response to the FoWC reviews and the decisions which are being taken by Cabinet Members. It is vital that the plans do not negatively impact upon the quality of service that residents and stakeholders receive which means it is crucial that these decisions are subject to extensive scrutiny. For this reason, each individual Policy and Scrutiny Committee will be scrutinising the Council's response to the FoWC reviews over the coming year.

This past year has been one where there has been a great focus on Westminster, with three major national events (Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III) happening within the space of a year, alongside the day-to-day running of the Council to provide services to residents and stakeholders. When presented with the Workforce Update item, which included details of high engagement scores from the staff 'Our Voice' survey, the Commission recognised that there has been a plethora of good work which has been undertaken to improve the workforce alongside high scores for the City Survey which highlights a correlation between delivery of world class services and being a world class employer. However, the Commission acknowledged that there are areas to improve in the workforce and suggested changes to the Our Voice staff survey questions, with the expectation that a workforce report will come back to the Commission next year.

[Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)

[What does the Committee do?](#)

The Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the broad range of important issues that make up the portfolio of the Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector and Children's Services and Young People, Learning and Leisure.

This Committee also has an important and external statutory duty which it must carry out in relation to public health and looks at the work of the NHS provider trusts including Imperial, Chelsea and Westminster, Central London Community Healthcare and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust. The committee also looks at the way the health service interacts jointly with our social care services, the voluntary sector, independent providers and other council services to provide better health services to meet the diverse needs of Westminster residents and improve their wellbeing. The Committee acts as a 'critical friend' by recommending ways that health-related services could be improved but also has a formal power to refer any variation in health services to the Secretary of State should they consider that the changes are inappropriate.

This Committee performs an important role around safeguarding matters for vulnerable adults and children, assuring that the Council's approach to such matters is of a high standard. Additionally, the committee has a remit which also includes education. The Council therefore has a duty to make sure that this Committee includes the following (non-voting) representatives in its membership: one Church of England diocese representative, one Roman Catholic diocese representative, two parent governor representatives, and two headteachers from local schools or academies.

Membership (until May 2023)

Councillors Iman Less, Tim Mitchell, Ellie Ormsby, Angela Piddock (Chair), Karen Scarborough, Selina Short and Max Sullivan. Co-opted Members: Alix Ascough, Marina Coleman, Mark Hewitt and Professor Ryan Nichol.

Highlights from the year

Over the 2022/23 municipal year, the Committee has considered a wide breadth of items. Particular highlights include the significant involvement and impact in the consultation for the proposed Orthopaedic In-Patient Surgery in North West London. This followed plans and recommendations made by Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust to improve orthopaedic in-patient surgery and care in North West London. Staff from the Trust attended a meeting of the Committee and Members submitted several recommendations that were taken forward. The key topics highlighted by the Committee and responded to were: the consultation process to date and feedback from service users, the community, and partners, the importance of a joined-up approach between patient care services across the borough, the current waiting lists for orthopaedic care and the issues with addressing the backlog of patients in the borough, the costs to patients in travelling for treatment and the plans to transport patients between services, vulnerable residents, and the complimentary, digital aspect of the service to improve communication with patients.

Discussions regarding the future of the Gordon Hospital are still in progress and the Chair and Committee have played an active role in these. Members of Central North West London NHS have attended Committee on two occasions and consultation is ongoing about the need for an inpatient mental health care offer for Westminster residents. As part of the overall scrutiny and consultation process, Members have sought further information regarding the quality

impact assessments that have been carried out, further data on the length of time it takes someone with acute mental health care needs to access a hospital bed, how partner, voluntary, and local emergency departments have been affected since the closure of the Gordon Hospital, and how these items are being monitored.

The Committee has also considered the Council's Children and Young People's plan for 2023 /2026, to ensure the Council can be held to account in delivering the required actions to achieve its priority outcomes and objectives for young people. It has also investigated the benefits of the internationally recognised and respected International Baccalaureate programme for young people, and in doing so, considered the academic outcomes that give students optimum choices in and outside of the UK, retention, and overall student engagement and success.

The Committee received updates at each meeting from Councillor Nafsika Butler-Thalassis and Councillor Tim Roca on matters concerning their portfolios. Additionally, the Committee has received written updates from partners such as Healthwatch, the Central North West London NHS, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ofsted.

As part of the scrutiny function and to ensure the Committee keep abreast of local interventions, site visits have been carried out in the community. Highlights include the Gordon Hospital, Crisis House in Paddington, and the Westminster Academy, where Members met with service users, on-site personnel, and officers. The Committee have found these visits to be of particular benefit in their understanding of matters that come to scrutiny and these visits will be continued in 2023/24.

[North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

The Chair of the Children, Adult Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Piddock, is a Member of the North West London Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee. This Committee meets with representatives of NHS North West London to discuss and consider matters concerning the NHS, its decision making process, and consultations. Over the course of the last year, Councillor Piddock has been involved in discussions regarding Integrated Care Systems (following the enactment of The Health and Care Act 2022), the Primary Care Strategy, GP accessibility, The Gordon Hospital, and the Palliative Care Review.

[Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)

[What does the Committee do?](#)

The Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services. Key policy areas and programmes within the remit of this committee include: housing management, housing associations and registered providers, the Housing Solutions Service (HSS), housing allocations, rough sleeping and homelessness, regeneration, community and environmental improvements and the Climate Emergency.

[Membership \(until May 2023\)](#)

Councillors Gillian Arrindell, Robert Eagleton, David Harvey, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Patricia McAllister (Chair), Alan Mendoza and Cara Sanquest.

Highlights from the year

This Committee has focussed a significant part of its scrutiny work over the 2022/23 municipal year on topics associated with housing. A significant focus has been the Council's capital works programme in relation to housing. This has included how capital works can become more sustainable, how the Council is meeting its objectives, as well as the challenges of managing leaseholder bills against a backdrop of increasing labour and material costs.

The Committee have also considered the Climate Action Programme including, greenhouse gas emissions in Westminster, the existing Climate Emergency Action Plan for Westminster, the actions that have been delivered to date, and a timeline for reviewing the Action Plan to reflect the priorities of the new administration. Of particular focus to the Committee has been how the Council are actioning climate engagement activities, the Climate Emergency Programme, and the plans to engage Westminster residents and stakeholders in climate action through the use of a Citizens' Climate Assembly.

Included in the scrutiny of regeneration initiatives, the Committee has reviewed the ways in which the Council seeks to improve the environment in which our residents live on the Council's housing estates across the borough. This has included discussions on gardens and green spaces, recycling services, estate security, and community initiatives to aid cohesion and resident involvement.

The Ebury Bridge Regeneration Project came to scrutiny in December 2022 and the Committee carried out a site visit in October 2022, where Members viewed the plans for each phase of the project and heard from the developers, architects, and officers managing resident engagement. Of particular priority to the Committee has been the support provided to families and individuals impacted by the estate regeneration, how consultation and engagement is undertaken and how this compares to best practice across the regeneration sector, what these policies provide for residents throughout the process, how residents' concerns and complaints have been managed and whether these processes can be improved. There has also been a focus on the housing offer that will be available to Westminster residents on completion of the project, including new homes, and how this may assist the housing waiting lists. This has included topics such as the Council's approach to rehousing, acquisitions, valuations, and compensation. The Committee has also considered sustainability and the carbon position of the project and the future opportunities for residents to remain engaged post completion of the new estate.

Items that have been scrutinised by this Committee have also included recommendations for housing service improvement and measures that could be incorporated into the delivery to further support Westminster residents. Housing repairs, mechanical and electrical services and mould and condensation has been of particular focus due to the increasing demand and support that has been required in this economic environment. Concerns surrounding homelessness across the borough has brought the provision of temporary accommodation to this Committee. Members have reviewed the supply and demand for temporary accommodation how it is sourced, the standards delivered, and households supported. In particular, the Committee fed into discussions about how temporary accommodation can best be delivered in the future.

The Committee also received updates at each meeting from Councillor Matt Noble and Councillor Liza Begum concerning their portfolios.

Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee

What does the Committee do?

The Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection as well as the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality. Key policy areas and programmes within the remit of this Committee include: parks and open spaces, air quality, recycling, waste and street cleansing (collection and enforcement), highways, parking policy and enforcement, mortuaries, Parliament Square and communications unit, community protection services, police liaison and Integrated Gangs Unit, community engagement, diversity and inclusion, resident groups and local forums, the Ward Budget Programme and licensing policies.

Membership (until May 2023)

Councillors Melvyn Caplan, Laila Cunningham, Iman Less, Mark Shearer, James Small-Edwards, Judith Southern and Jason Williams (Chair).

Highlights from the year

In the municipal year 2022/23, the Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee covered a wide range of topics. The Committee takes responsibility for discharging the Council's statutory responsibilities under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006, to act as the Council's crime and disorder committee. As part of this, the Committee invited the temporary Chief Inspector of Central West BCU (Westminster Neighbourhood Teams and the Royal Parks) who took questions on protecting young people's safety in terms of stop and search, understanding ethnic disproportionality in arrest figures and an initial response to Baroness Casey's report in terms of how police in Westminster were addressing the findings.

In addition to this, the Committee received a report on the severe flooding in Westminster in 2021 and the ensuing report by Thames Water. This led to recommendations for the Cabinet Member to consider, providing insight that he had not been aware of and committed to taking to Thames Water in his discussions with them. Another item of note was examining the award of the waste service contract, following officer and legal recommendations. The Committee gave comment to the officer recommendations and analysed current offering and what needed to be changed to make the contract tender process even more competitive in the future.

In the past year, the strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour was released and this Committee had the opportunity to review the draft strategy and give steer on how the final consultation could be most effective. As part of this discussion, Members questioned the length of the proposed consultation and suggested an easy-read version be produced. In terms of the strategy itself Members gave comment on the mental health offering, the focus of priorities, the need for after-care and highlighted the need for a concerted effort to improve existing relationships with the police and mental health services.

The Committee also took substantive looks at the electrification of gas street lighting, environmental enforcement, options for a parking review, food safety and ratings and a six month review of the waste action squad.

The Committee received regular updates from the Cabinet member for Communities and Public Protection, Cllr Aicha Less as well as the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality, Cllr Paul Dimoldenberg on priorities and updates within their respective portfolios. These updates covered almost everything within the portfolio, however, routinely questions arose over issues relating to dockless bike parking, fly-tipping, gaslights, cycle lanes, pedicabs, city inspectors, night time safety for women and street entertainment policy.

Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee

What does the Committee do?

The Finance, Planning and Economic Development Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development. Key policy areas and programmes within the remit of this committee include: economic development, employment, town planning, planning policy and place-shaping, Smart City programme, broadband and digital innovation in the public realm, finance, the Corporate Property portfolio, Capital Programme, procurement, customer services, legal and the council's digital services.

Membership (until May 2023)

Councillors Concia Albert, Paul Fisher (Chair), Sara Hassan, Patrick Lilley, Ralu Oteh-Osoka, Ian Rowley and Paul Swaddle.

Highlights from the year

In the municipal year 2022/23, the Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee met five rather than six times due to a lack of business for the scheduled meeting in December. However, the Committee still covered a number of unique substantive topics over the remaining five meetings.

The Committee was used as a forum for the publication and scrutiny of issues relating to the Cooke report into the Oxford Street District Programme. This was an important opportunity for Members to scrutinise a sensitive subject which was connected to a controversial project. The Chief Executive, Stuart Love, also attended to respond to Member questions which were as a whole carefully considered and effective. Members were given the chance to ensure lessons the Chief Executive, and by extension the Council, had been learnt from the Programme, in terms of managing escalating costs, procurement exercises, hiring of external contractors, senior accountability and more generally the wider working culture at Westminster City Council.

The Committee was also given the opportunity to provide a steer to the ongoing review into the Council's 'Report It' function which allows residents to report issues they experience. Several recommendations were offered by the Committee, such as caution over misleading wording and ensuring that the final product does not include unnecessary vernacular that a typical resident may not be familiar with. The Committee also received a paper referencing the impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had on Council finances and the ongoing effect this continued to have. Members sought assurance that the Council was adequately prepared for any future 'black-swan' events and how the Council could better protect itself from these shocks in terms of pre-agreed contracts.

The Committee also took substantive looks at the how the Community Infrastructure Levy works and can be used to support community priorities, the Smart City programme, new Oxford Street Programme and understanding how neighbourhood planning can facilitate better outcomes by supporting neighbourhood forums better.

The Committee received regular updates from the Cabinet member for Finance and Council Reform, Councillor David Boothroyd as well as the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, Committee Geoff Barraclough on priorities and updates within their respective portfolios. These updates covered almost everything within the portfolio, however, routine questions came over issues relating to Council Tax collection, macroeconomic pressures, cost of living support, drop-off in major planning applications, place-shaping schemes and the scope for Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

In April 2023, the Committee were invited to the launch of the Responsible Procurement Strategy at the Grand Junction.

Task Groups

As already mentioned, a decision was made by the Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission to allow scrutiny Members to settle into their new roles before establishing new task groups; the exception to this was the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group.

Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Budget Scrutiny Task Group (“BSTG”) is a standing task group that meets every year to scrutinise the proposed annual Budget. The BSTG has the following terms of reference: *to consider, on behalf of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees, budget options and draft business plans and estimates at the appropriate stages in the business planning cycle and to submit recommendations/ comments to the cabinet and/or cabinet members.* Cabinet must take into account and give due regard to any views and recommendations from the BSTG in drawing up firm budget proposals for submission to the Council. The report to Council must reflect those comments (and those of other task groups and committees, if any) as well as the Cabinet’s response.

The budget scrutiny process this year was of particular importance being the first draft Budget since the local elections in May 2022 and reflecting the priorities of a new administration. The membership of the BSTG in January 2023 was made up of 11 Councillors, with four Majority Group representatives and three Opposition Group representatives attending each of the three sessions. Councillors were able to bring their full range of professional expertise and local government experience to the deliberations which enabled a diverse range of cross-party questions and facilitated a robust interrogation of the draft Budget.

The Chair of the BSTG commended the significant investment of time and energy by officers from all directorates that went into compiling the reports and Equality Impact Assessments, answering Members’ questions and following up on requests. The BSTG this year increased the transparency of the scrutiny process by choosing to livestream all the sessions on the Council website and by inviting members of the public to sit in the public gallery. Additionally, with help from the Council’s Communications team, the Chair commissioned a video which explained what the BSTG is and how residents can view the proceedings.

The BSTG determined that the proposed Budget was financially robust with the potential to deliver on the strategic ambitions being pursued by the new administration. However, there were a number of risk areas in the draft Budget that the BSTG highlighted for future monitoring over the year ahead and which were reported to Cabinet to consider. Some of these risks may also be issues the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committees wish to consider in greater depth in due course. Risks included: the Pimlico District Heating Unit, Council Tax freeze, Housing Revenue Account, Oxford Street Programme, borrowing requirements, Minimum Income Guarantee, parking charges, the Future of Westminster Commission, the fall in Major Planning Applications, Temporary Accommodation, funding grants for schools, and Westminster Builds.

Notwithstanding however, there were a number of positive features also noted regarding the Council's overall financial strategy, including: digital innovation, contingencies, returns, planned preventative maintenance, Regent Street funding, City Hall rent, "Electrification", Children's Services, additional stock condition surveys and savings. There are ongoing discussions about the future of the BSTG and what improvements can be made to ensure it is an effective tool to scrutinise the draft Budget each year. There are a number of opportunities which can be examined as part of this, which include: transparency, participatory budgeting, Cabinet Member participation, an increased number of sessions, and improved presentation of materials.

Reporting use of Special Urgency and General Exception Procedures

Special Urgency procedures have been deployed once in the 2022-23 municipal year.

The City Council's Constitution sets out, under Article 33.12 (Access to Information), that 28 days' notice must be given where the Cabinet, a Cabinet Committee, an individual Cabinet Member or Officer intends to make a Key Decision. Where the provision of such notice is impracticable the Constitution provides both General Exception and Special Urgency provisions. The General Exception provisions require, amongst other things, a period of five clear working days' notice to be given. Where compliance with the General Exception principle is impractical the decision can be taken under Special Urgency provisions.

Cases of Special Urgency can only proceed where the decision maker has obtained agreement that the making of the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be delayed from: (a) the Chairman of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee; or (b) if there is no such person, or if they are unable to act, the Lord Mayor.

During the municipal year, 2022/23, the provision of Special Urgency was used once to facilitate an urgent decision, entitled 'Direct Award of Travel Care contracts for Children and Adults'. The reason for Special Urgency was an unforeseen situation where the provider withdrew and continuity of this statutory service needed to be maintained.

In this single case of Special Urgency provision being used in 2022/23, the approval of the Chair of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee was given. This approval was given by Councillor Angela Piddock, Chair of the Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee, who agreed to the use of Special Urgency provisions on 11 August 2022.

In accordance with statutory and Constitutional requirements, following the approval of the Chair of Policy and Scrutiny Committee, two notices were published. The first detailing that

the decision would be taken under Special Urgency and the second was a use of General Exception provisions, stating the decision had been made and including the report upon which the decision was based.

Reporting use of Call-in

One decision was called-in in the 2022/23 municipal year.

Under provision 19.16 of the Call-in procedures in the Constitution, when a decision is made by the Executive, or a key decision is made by an officer with delegated authority from the Cabinet, or under joint arrangements, the decision shall be published. All the Members of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee(s) and all relevant ward Councillors will be sent copies of the report at the time of issue. That notice will bear the date on which it is published and will specify that the decision will come into force, and may then be implemented at 5pm on the fifth working day after the publication of the decision. However, if, during this period, the Proper Officer shall call-in a decision for scrutiny, or the Committee if so requested by any three Members of the Committee entitled to vote on the subject matter of the decision and/or, in relation to a decision affecting a single ward by all three members of that ward, the Proper Officer shall then notify the decision-taker of the call-in.

On behalf of the Chief Executive, who is the Proper Officer for call-ins, a meeting of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee was summoned to vote on and scrutinise the decision of Councillors Noble and Boothroyd titled 'Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position'. As set out in the Constitution, the meeting was convened within, or as reasonably practical thereafter, 10 working days and held on Wednesday 8 February 2023.

As this was a joint decision between Councillors Noble and Boothroyd, both Members were invited to the meeting but Councillor Noble led discussions as the reasons given for the call-in were primarily of regeneration-relation not finance-relation but also because the decision was called-in by Members of the Climate Action, Housing Regeneration and Renters Policy and Scrutiny Committee, not the Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillors Harvey, Mendoza and Hitchcock called-in the titled 'Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position' decision for the reasons below.

"Homes for Intermediate rent – It will be a crushing disappointment to the people who work in Westminster, and thus make it what it is, that their life options will be limited by the huge reduction in intermediate rental homes from 126 to 21. This means that 105 local people and families who had hoped to live in Pimlico so that they could work locally will no longer have a chance. Out of a total of 781 homes, fewer than three in every hundred, will go to people who serve this City and might qualify for intermediate affordable homes. Surely, with Mayoral funding it would be possible to build more social homes without making it even more difficult for the teacher, the office worker, vet assistant, council worker, nurse, or skilled SME worker to live in Westminster so sustaining an inclusive community?

Segregation of tenures – we thought that people coming together to live next door to each other on the Ebury estate will be able to do just that. But instead, a decision has been made to separate social, intermediate and market homes. To paraphrase Aneurin Bevan, where the

council is building homes, the home owner, the private renter, and the social housing tenant should all live in the same street for social cohesion.”

At the call-in meeting, Committee Members moved to a formal vote where there were two options presented: to take no further action or to refer the decision back to the decision-makers. If a majority of Committee Members vote to take no further action, the decision would stand. If a majority of Members vote to refer the decision back to the decision-makers, the decision would be reconsidered within 10 working days, or as soon as possible thereafter, to either amend the decision or not, adopting a final decision. Committee Members raised their hands to indicate their decision and the Statutory Scrutiny Officer recorded the result of the vote which was to take no further action (four for: three against).

Thanks and Further Information

The Policy and Scrutiny Committee Chairs consider that scrutiny is an independent yet collaborative process, the success of which depends on the involvement of many individuals and organisations, too numerous to list here. The Committee Chairs therefore wish to acknowledge and thank the following:

- all the councillors involved in the scrutiny function at Westminster, who form the membership of Westminster’s Policy and Scrutiny Committees;
- those members who also join the various scrutiny Task Groups and devote additional time to their scrutiny work;
- the Cabinet Members for their continuing support and openness to scrutiny recommendations;
- the independent external expert witnesses, who generously give their time and expertise to improve Westminster services for our residents;
- the Westminster officers who prepare and present the reports; and
- the Westminster Policy and Scrutiny Team for their support.

If you would like more information about how scrutiny works at Westminster or if you wish to make a suggestion about areas for scrutiny by one of the committees, please contact us at scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk.

The work programme for the year 2022/23 for each Policy and Scrutiny Committee is shown in Appendix 1, attached.

Appendix 1 - Policy and Scrutiny Work Programmes for the 2022-23 municipal year

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

- Future of Westminster Commission
- Emergency Preparedness Planning
- Community Participation
- Workforce Update

Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Annual Youth Justice Plan
- Out of School Provision
- The Gordon Hospital
- Care Coordination Solution
- Orthopaedic In-Patient Surgery in Northwest London
- 2023-2026 Children and Young People's Plan
- Adult Safeguarding
- Local Safeguarding Children Partnership 2021-2022
- Westminster Academy and the International Baccalaureate
- The Adult Pathway into Mental Health Services

Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Climate Action Programme
- Repairs, Mechanical and Electrical Services
- Management of Housing Capital Programme
- Communal, Community and Environmental Improvements
- Support for Communities throughout the Estate Regeneration Process
- Decision of Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position
- Provision of Temporary Accommodation to meet needs of Homeless Households
- Pimlico Strategic Options

Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Environmental Enforcement
- Policing in the City of Westminster
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy Consultation
- Parking Service
- Flooding
- Food Safety and Ratings
- Waste Action Squad
- Waste Service Contracts

Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Community Infrastructure Levy
- Smart City Programme
- Oxford Street District Programme
- Ongoing effects of Covid-19 on Council Finances
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Report-It



Westminster Scrutiny Commission

Date:	22 June 2023
Classification:	General Release
Title:	2023/2024 Work Programme
Report of:	Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison
Cabinet Member Portfolios:	Leader of the Council
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	All
Report Author and Contact Details:	Clare O'Keefe cokeefe@westminster.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report asks the Commission to discuss topics for the 2023/2024 work programme. The proposals set out in Appendix 2 have been developed in consultation with Members, Senior Officers as well as Members of the Executive (Cabinet) on their plans for the year ahead to ensure scrutiny is focused on those areas where it may have most impact.

2. Meeting Dates for the 2023/2024 Municipal Year

- 2.1 The Commission is advised that the next scheduled meeting dates for the 2023/2024 year are:
 - 5 October 2023;
 - 14 December 2023; and
 - 20 March 2024.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Policy and Scrutiny team has been supporting the Chair and Commission to consider the work programme for the next municipal year. The process for this included; consultation with the Leader of the Council, consultation with the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and relevant Heads of Service, following up on items and commitments from previous meetings, consideration of forward plans in the Leader's portfolio and challenges identified across the Directorates.

3.2 The aim of this process has been to culminate in a work programme which:

- Focuses on what is important;
- Focuses on areas where performance might be improved;
- Focuses on services which are important to residents;
- Focuses on where scrutiny can make a difference and add value;
- Proactively feeds into policy development by contributing to pre-tender considerations or strategy development for example; and
- Uses the insight of backbench Members to act as critical friend to services of the City Council and our partners thereby enabling good governance and excellent services.

4. Work Programme for 2023/24

4.1 The Commission is asked to consider the work programme for the municipal year, 2023/2024, set out in Appendix 2. The Commission is requested to discuss the proposed topics listed as well as provide comments and suggestions.

4.2 When considering the work programme, and agreeing an overall programme of scrutiny activity, the Commission should have regard to whether the work programme is achievable in terms of both Officer and Member time, taking into account that the Commission is scheduled to meet four times per year. Members are also reminded that it is advisable to hold some capacity in reserve for any urgent issues that might arise.

4.3 Each Committee, and the Commission, has discretion to establish Task Groups to examine key issues in more detail and also to commission Single Member Studies. The Commission is asked to consider whether they would like to establish a Task Group or commission a Single Member Study. The Commission should be advised that both Members and Officers will only be able to successfully take part in and support a finite number of Task Groups at any one time.

If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the background papers, please contact Clare O’Keefe.

cokeefe@westminster.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Appendix 2: Work Programme

Appendix 3: Action Tracker

WESTMINSTER SCRUTINY COMMISSION

COMPOSITION

7 Members of the Council (4 nominated by the Majority Party and 3 by the Opposition Party) but shall not include a member of the Cabinet.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- (a) To carry out those duties assigned to the Westminster Scrutiny Commission as set out in the Constitution.
- (b) To carry out the Policy and Scrutiny function in respect of matters within the remit of the Council's non-executive Committees and Sub-Committees, which are within the broad remit of the Committee, in accordance with the Policy and Scrutiny procedure rules.
- (c) To be responsible for the management and co-ordination of the Policy and Scrutiny function.
- (d) To assign tasks to the most appropriate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, where the issue does not sit within the terms of reference of a particular Policy and Scrutiny Committee.
- (e) To scrutinise the work of the Leader of the Council including at public Question and Answer session(s).
- (f) To approve the Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny activity, as required under the Constitution.

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APPENDIX 2 – Westminster Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24

ROUND 2 5 October 2023		
Agenda item	Purpose	Responsible Cabinet Member and officer/s
Policy and Scrutiny Committee Updates	The Commission to receive verbal updates from the Chairs of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees.	N/A
Scrutiny Improvement Progress	To briefly update the Commission on progress made on improvements to Policy and Scrutiny following the review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.	Richard Cressey, Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison
Leader of the Council Q&A	To update the Scrutiny Commission on key areas of work within its remit and Leader’s priorities	Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of the Council Stuart Love, Chief Executive
Fair Tax and Economic Crime in Westminster	To review progress made towards the Fair Tax Pledge and the Westminster Against Dirty Money campaign, as well as provide an opportunity for the Commission to make recommendations and steer the direction of the schemes.	Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of the Council Councillor David Boothroyd, Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform Pedro Wrobel, Executive Director of Innovation and Change
Emergency Preparedness	To review the Council’s Emergency Preparedness.	Mark Chalmers, Prepare and Prevent Operational CONTEST Manager
Work programme	To review the work programme in light of events and recent discussions.	Clare O’Keefe, Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

ROUND 3 14 December 2023		
Agenda item	Purpose	Responsible Cabinet Member and officer/s
Policy and Scrutiny Committee Updates	The Commission to receive verbal updates from the Chairs of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees.	N/A
Scrutiny Improvement Progress	To briefly update the Commission on progress made on improvements to Policy and Scrutiny following the review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.	Richard Cressey, Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison

Chief Executive Q&A	To update the Scrutiny Commission on key areas of work within its remit and Chief Executive's priorities.	Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of the Council Stuart Love, Chief Executive
Member Development and Training	To review the training and development provided to Members, to discuss the advantages of training and development being reactive or proactive and explore what further support can be offered to Members in recognition of the variety of roles a councillor can perform.	TBC
Work programme	To review the work programme in light of events and recent discussions.	Clare O'Keefe, Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

ROUND 4 20 March 2024		
Agenda item	Purpose	Responsible Cabinet Member and officer/s
Policy and Scrutiny Committee Updates	The Commission to receive verbal updates from the Chairs of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees.	N/A
Scrutiny Improvement Progress	To briefly update the Commission on progress made on improvements to Policy and Scrutiny following the review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.	Richard Cressey, Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison
Leader of the Council Q&A	To update the Scrutiny Commission on key areas of work within its remit and Leader's priorities.	Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of the Council Stuart Love, Chief Executive
Fairer Westminster Strategy	To review progress made in the last financial year against the Council's delivery plan for Fairer Westminster as well as look ahead to priorities for the following financial year.	Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of the Council Pedro Wrobel, Executive Director of Innovation and Change
Workforce update	To present to the Committee a report which brings together the staff survey results, staff turnover, diversity and inclusion and the refreshed Council vision.	Stuart Love, Chief Executive Lee Witham, Director of People Services
Emergency Preparedness (written report)	To review the Council's Emergency Preparedness.	Mark Chalmers, Prepare and Prevent Operational CONTEST Manager
Work programme	To review the work programme in light of events and recent discussions.	Clare O'Keefe, Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

Unallocated items – these may either be substituted in for a substantive item elsewhere in the year or may be rolled over for future municipal years

Corporate Project Management Office	To examine the work of the Change Board, how project management works within the Council, good internal governance procedures and oversight on projects that are high risk.
City Promotions Events and Film	To receive an update on the work of the City Promotions Events and Film Team as well as their future work.
Pay Policy Review	To review the Council’s Pay Policy, including staff rewards and benefits. <i>This depends on whether there are changes to the policy and if the Commission would like the opportunity to feed into this.</i>
Public Affairs and Partner Engagement	A review of the approach that Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster has towards public affairs priorities, partner engagement, lobbying and media relations. <i>Suggested for 2024.</i>

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Appendix 3 - ACTION TRACKER
Westminster Scrutiny Commission

3 May 2023		
Agenda Item	Action	Status/Follow Up
Item 5 Leader of the Council Update	The Commission will receive a briefing from the Bi-Borough Director of Education on the mechanisms to provide support for secondary schools.	Completed 31/05
	The Commission be provided with information relating to the Rent Support Fund, including: the amount of funds allocated, if additional funds will top the scheme up and where the funds are coming from.	Leader's Senior Advisor following this up
	The Commission will receive information regarding reporting on the Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan, including what will be presented to the Audit and Performance Committee.	Completed 25/05
Item 6 Workforce Update	The Commission will receive grievance statistics in the next Workforce Update report as well as data regarding length of service, turnover and sickness.	Complete; this was confirmed during the meeting.
	The Commission will be provided with current numbers of temporary and agency staff on the Council workforce.	Completed 12/05
	The Staff Engagement scores broken down by length of service of staff will be shared with the Commission.	Completed 12/05
	The Head of People Services will consider adding to the Staff Survey, for those who have reported inappropriate behaviour at work, bullying and harassment, a satisfaction rating on how their grievance has been dealt with.	Complete; this was confirmed during the meeting.
	The Head of People Services will consider adding to the Staff Survey a free text option for those who are responding to the statement 'If I was a member of the public contacting the Council, I would be confident of a good service'.	Complete; this was confirmed during the meeting.
	The Head of People Services will provide a list of local authorities who make up the local government benchmark used by People Insight.	Completed 12/05

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