



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 25 July, 2024**, Rooms 18.01-03, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Paul Fisher, Patricia McAllister, Angela Piddock (Chair), Caroline Sargent (virtual), Paul Swaddle and Jason Williams.

Also Present: Mark Chalmers (Head of Community Safety and Specialist Services), Adam Hug (Leader of the Council), Councillor Aicha Less (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Public Protection), Clare O’Keefe (Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Superintendent Beth Pirie (Neighbourhood Policing and Strategic Partnerships, Metropolitan Police Service), Adam Taylor (Community Safety Manager), and Mark Wiltshire (Director of Public Protection and Licensing).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 The Committee noted that Councillor Tim Mitchell had sent his apologies.
- 1.2 The Committee noted that Councillor Caroline Sargent was attending the meeting virtually.
- 1.3 The Committee welcomed Councillor Patricia McAllister to the membership having been elected to Chair of the Vulnerable Adults, Health and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 July 2024.
- 1.4 The Committee noted that the Committee’s meeting date had been postponed due to the General Election and the membership was thanked for its flexibility in rearranging the date.

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 13 March 2024.

RESOLVED:

- 3.2 That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

4 WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

4.1 The Committee noted the work programme set out in the Committee's report and held a discussion on the agenda for its next meeting on 10 October 2024.

4.2 The Committee stated the usefulness of the Committee Tracker and importance of receiving prompt responses to actions, information requests and recommendations.

ACTION:

4.3 That the Committee will scrutinise Westminster After Dark at its meeting on 10 October 2024.

5 POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATES

5.1 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Climate Action, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Jason Williams. The Committee was updated on the following:

- The Air Quality Action Plan was the substantive item at its recent meeting.
- The Committee held detailed discussions on enforcement, training, licensing objectives and involving more stakeholders in aspects of the Plan's delivery.

5.2 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Paul Fisher. The Committee was updated on the following:

- The next meeting will focus on the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, recognising the Council faces acute pressures in this area and is working to address the issues.
- The next meeting will also receive an update on the Oxford Street Programme where the Committee has a role to carefully scrutinise the public realm aspects of the Programme.

5.3 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Vulnerable Adults, Health and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Patricia McAllister. The Committee was updated on the following:

- The Committee received a report on Community Pharmacy provision, particularly relating to access to medicine for socially vulnerable residents.
- The Committee held detailed discussions on self-care, vulnerable residents' access to medicines and the importance of access overall.
- The Committee also received a report on the Winter Hot Meals Provision Pilot and within this also held a related conversation on aids and adaptations.

5.4 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Young People, Learning and Employment Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Angela Piddock. The Committee was updated on the following:

- The Committee recently had two opportunities for site visits.
- One site visit was to observe and discuss the work due to be undertaken in the ActiveWestminster Strategy.
- The Committee also had the opportunity to see the delivery of employment options for young people in North Paddington.
- The usefulness of site visits to scrutiny was emphasised.

6 LEADER'S CABINET UPDATE

6.1 The Committee received an overview of the Leader's Cabinet Update report from Councillor Adam Hug. The Committee noted that the Council is working with the new government, including three new MPs, to ensure they are fully up to speed on the issues the Council faces and its priorities.

6.2 The Committee asked questions on the following:

- Glyphosate: the use of this across the City and its recent ban.
- Waste and cleaning resources: the budget allocation of £750k to enhancing waste and cleaning resources, and how this has not moved from elsewhere but rather a new addition in the budget.
- Finance arrangements with the New West End Company: the processes to progress the financial arrangements with the New West End Company and their members for the Oxford Street Programme, teams within the Council work to secure the legal agreements for each business, moving forward with design stages, the importance of securing the agreements before 'breaking ground', and the significant achievements of the Programme, including the Memorandum of Understanding.
- Free school meals: the infrastructure in place for all schools to competently deliver free school meals, and how the Council supports schools on the delivery of this. The free school lunch offer for up to 14 year olds in secondary schools and how this is working.
- Electric bikes: the network of around 320 parking bays and the status of this trial. The areas where incorrectly parked bikes are consistently reported, risk to safety, enforcement mechanisms, holding the providers to account, compliance and fines and the importance of a responsive service.
- Flooding: the discussions happening on flood risk and long-term flood defences in the south of the City.
- Housing Service insourcing: insourcing within the Service and the relationship between allocations and temporary accommodation, including the work being undertaken on these.
- Tents in the City: the importance of getting the balance right in terms of measures and interventions taken and treating people who are homeless and rough sleeping with compassion, joint working and the pressure applied on Transport for London.
- Contractors reviewing ongoing projects: the outcome of the work of independent contractors undertaking reviews of projects.
- Short-term lets: the Day of Action to identify empty homes and short-term lets in breach of the 90-night restriction, and the Leader's role in this. The success of enforcement action and difficulties in compiling a strong evidence base, the

size of the team responsible for this, and the importance of prosecuting a small number well over doing a small amount of work on many cases.

ACTION:

- 6.3 That the next Leader's Cabinet Update report will report on pedicabs.

INFORMATION REQUESTS:

- 6.4 That the Committee will receive information on flood risk and long-term flood defences in the south of the City.
- 6.5 That the Committee will receive information relating to enforcement figures on short-term lets in breach of the 90-day restriction.

7 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- 7.1 The Committee received an introduction from Councillor Hub and an overview of the Emergency Preparedness report from Mark Chalmers (Head of Community Safety and Specialist Services).

- 7.2 The Committee asked questions on the following:

- Training in schools: how training in humanitarian assistance should be undertaken more consistently in schools in the City.
- Business continuity: a detailed discussion on the recent CrowdStrike/Windows global IT outage, how the Council was affected, levels of impact across the City, the hierarchy of priorities if the Council is affected in the future, ensuring planning assumptions are correct and the importance of being able to coordinate and communicate during an outage to keep essential Council services running.
- Cyber security: the significant likelihood of malicious attacks, joint working with Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, links to other states and mitigating what is a constant threat.
- Training and briefing: Councillors and their roles in emergency preparedness, including how briefings and training should be undertaken so Councillors can be as effective as possible during an emergency.

ACTIONS:

- 7.3 That business continuity will be a focus in the next Emergency Preparedness report due at the Committee's meeting on 10 December 2024.
- 7.4 That Councillors will have biannual emergency preparedness training which focuses on their roles in an emergency to support residents in the City. This training should be interactive, with material and tools to take away so Councillors are able to refer to them when needed.

INFORMATION REQUEST:

- 7.5 That the Committee will receive the report on Cyber Security that was submitted to the Audit and Performance Committee on 18 July 2024.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 7.6 The Humanitarian Assistance team should consider offering more humanitarian assistance training in schools and to a wider cohort of people.

8 CRIME AND DISORDER

- 8.1 The Committee received a brief overview of the Crime and Disorder report from Councillor Aicha Less (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Public Protection) and Adam Taylor (Community Safety Manager).

- 8.2 The Committee heard from Superintendent Beth Pirie (Neighbourhood Policing and Strategic Partnerships, Metropolitan Police Service) about the Safer Westminster Partnership. The Committee also noted sincere apologies from the Probation Service representative due at the meeting and the written submission received.

- 8.3 The Committee asked questions on the following:

- Violence against women and girls: how attitudes from prominent men can have severely negative impacts on perceptions of women and girls and should be treated as a concern.
- Awareness in schools: the ongoing training in schools in the City on areas such as domestic violence.
- Reducing reoffending figures: access to jobs and training after prison terms could help reduce reoffending figures. Formal links should be established with organisations like Westminster Adult Education Service as they could help those susceptible to reoffending.
- Systemic failures: a significant number of those in prison have been in care and the Partnership should focus on keeping children and young people out of care initially. In addition, school exclusions should be reduced and for those young people who are off-rolled, there should be adequate support in place which is led by the Partnership.
- Culture of impunity: residents have been increasingly describing criminals operating with a sense of impunity and have low confidence that the police will action reports. Despite good work from officers on the ground, and the benefit of focused action on high-profile crimes, the Metropolitan Police leadership could be described as not giving enough attention to volume crimes as attention is diverted to high-profile cases in fear of social media or political backlash.
- New government promises: whether the Metropolitan Police will see funding for more officers, including the possibility of having a specifically designated group to operate at the centre of the City.
- Resources: people come from all over Europe and beyond to commit crime in the City, and whether more resources is the answer to combatting offences, and the importance of being realistic about the significant volume of crime.

- Arrest processes: the process a police officer goes through to take a person into custody, how this means one less officer on the street and the difficulty of getting the right staffing balance and the different models tried over decades.
- The system: how the system needs to work from start to finish; crime itself as well as the causes of crime have not been treated as they should have been.
- Policing by consent: the importance of policing by consent and the benefits from not only people in communities knowing each other but also knowing officers in services such as Metropolitan Police.
- Communication: issues of communication with police officers and confidence that there will be a timely response when issues have been raised.
- Perceptions: the percentage of victims across the City who are residents, residents who are perpetrators, as well as the importance of understanding the impact on local people and how this drives perceptions of fear.
- Reassurance: how officers in the Safer Westminster Partnership provide reassurance to residents when a serious offence has been committed.
- Off-street duties: the locations of off-street duties that police officers undertake over a ten-week period.
- Reporting: the importance of reporting to detect patterns of behaviour.
- Responsibility: recognising that whilst many children unfortunately are in sad situations at home, some parents in more stable environments could take accountability rather than letting schools or the Council to take on the responsibility.
- Crime statistics in certain areas: whilst crime statistics can be used positively to reduce crime, it should be recognised that reducing crime in the City should not be achieved through reducing numbers of visitors.
- Equalities impact: the usefulness of data without adequate and understandable commentary if one has not read the Safer Westminster Partnership Strategy.

8.4 The Committee extended its thanks to Superintendent Beth Pirie and noted its appreciation of the time and consideration taken to answer questions.

RECOMMENDATION:

8.5 The Westminster Probation Service should consider establishing formal links with learning and development organisations such as Westminster Adult Education Service to help prevent reoffending. The Safer Westminster Partnership should look to facilitate this recommendation at a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 8:25pm.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____