



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# DRAFT MINUTES

## Westminster Scrutiny Commission

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Monday 30 November 2015** at 7.00pm in Committee Rooms 3 & 4 - 17th Floor, City Hall.

**Members Present:** Councillors Ian Adams (Chairman), David Harvey, Andrew Smith and Barrie Taylor.

**Also present:** Councillor Philippa Roe.

#### 1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Brian Connell.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No declarations were received.

#### 3. MINUTES

3.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2015 as a correct record.

#### 4. UPDATE AND QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE CITY COUNCIL

4.1 The Commission received an update on current and forthcoming issues from Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of the City Council, who also responded to questions.

4.2 The Leader commented on the development of the *West End Partnership*, and highlighted the improvements for residents and the public realm that would arise from the associated investment. Responsible, managed business growth would also provide employment opportunities, and would support the Leader's three-year *City for All* vision.

- 4.3 The Leader also commented on progress in the City Council's skills and work programme, and on action that was being taken to reduce long-term unemployment in Westminster and to increase the number of apprenticeships for young people. The Leader considered that there was currently a significant mismatch between employers and skills, which needed to be addressed locally and on a regional or pan-London basis. The Commission noted that there were currently 18,000 unemployed people in Westminster, of who 11,000 were long-term unemployed; and 44 neither in employment, education or training (NEET).
- 4.4 The Commission discussed the programme for the devolution of powers from Central Government to London Councils, and noted that although the proposals had achieved general cross-party agreement, the governance structure for devolution was still to be determined. The Leader highlighted the need for the transfer of powers to support growth, and allow Westminster to benefit from the subsequent devolution of Business Rates in 2020. The Commission noted that the TfL capital budget was also due to be transferred to local authorities.
- 4.5 Commission Members also discussed measures that were being taken to make Westminster a Greener City. The Leader confirmed that environmental issues were taken very seriously, and that improvements were being made to air quality through reducing buses in Oxford Street by 40%, and by introducing electric buses and improved traffic flows.
- 4.6 The Commission commented on and the need to make provision for an aging population. The Leader acknowledged that this was a national issue that presented a particular challenge in Westminster, where land was expensive. The Leader considered that a new model may be needed for the care system, in which people could live in communities that would support enablement and avoid hospital admissions. The economic policy for people aged 70 and over was being challenged, as they currently received seven times the investment in health care required by people below that age. The Leader considered that public investment for the aging population could be more effective by integration with other areas such as care homes and employment.
- 4.7 The Leader acknowledged the importance of Westminster's residents having a sense of place, but did not support the creation of an overall vision, as the different village communities in Westminster had their own individual character. The Leader also confirmed that the City Council was moving forward on negotiations for the provision of super-fast broadband, which would benefit 75% of the borough.
- 4.8 Commission Members discussed the future of Tri-Borough working, and noted that although Tri-borough needed to be adjusted, the overall concept was still considered valid and would continue.
- 4.9 The Commission commended Westminster's Cabinet and Officers for the financial planning and modelling that had been undertaken in preparation for devolution, and noted that details of the financial settlement were anticipated on 17 December.

4.10 The Commission thanked the Leader for attending the meeting.

## **5. UPDATE AND QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

5.1 The Commission received an update on current and forthcoming corporate issues from Charlie Parker (Chief Executive), who also responded to questions.

5.2 The Chief Executive commented on the development and implementation of the *Westminster Way* programme, in which staff had attended sessions on leading through change; cultures and behaviours; managing expectations; and understanding how Westminster works in a political environment. The Commission noted that the response from Senior Managers and Band 4 staff had been good, and that the programme would continue to be rolled out to Band 4 and Band 3 staff during 2016.

5.3 The Commission discussed progress in the devolution of powers from Central Government to London Councils, together with the associated implications. It was acknowledged that the currently high number of FE colleges in Westminster was not sustainable, and that these would be consolidated following devolution with more specialisation on fewer sites.

5.4 The Chief Executive informed the Commission that the City Council was reviewing arrangements for the recruitment and retention of staff, and acknowledged that more could be done to recognise and reward outstanding work. Succession arrangements were also being reviewed, and the Commission noted that the national graduate scheme had been reintroduced at Westminster.

5.5 The Commission discussed the labour market in Westminster, and noted that the younger cohort of unemployed people often had no work experience which could lead to a disconnect. The Chief Executive acknowledged that people could need a phased transition into work, and Commission Members commented that young people often became carers, or could become fixed in low paid unskilled work.

5.6 The Chief Executive updated the Commission on progress in the Managed Services programme, and confirmed that Agresso had reached a milestone in clearing the backlog of payments. Improvements had also been made to other areas such as accounting, and the Commission noted that although the payroll success rate at Westminster had now reached 99%, this figure still needed to be improved.

5.7 The Chief Executive also commented on the provision of housing, and confirmed that work towards a pan-London approach was ongoing. The Commission recognised that land availability and prices made housing a particular problem for Westminster.

5.8 The Commission discussed the value of staff having a good geographical knowledge of Westminster and sense of place, together with an

understanding of the political background to the City Council's policies. Commission Members also discussed the findings of the Staff Survey, and the Chief Executive confirmed that since the last meeting, improvements had been made to concerns which had been raised concerning IT; the condition of City Hall; and bullying.

- 5.9 The Commission considered the effectiveness of scrutiny, and suggested that future updates from the Chief Executive include a contextual overview of what scrutiny had achieved, and how it had impacted on the City Council's business. The Chief Executive acknowledged the value of scrutiny in Westminster, and considered that it could be most effective when influencing policy.
- 5.10 Other issues discussed included asset transfers and Social Enterprise.
- 5.11 The Commission thanked the Chief Executive for attending the meeting.

## **6. POLICY & SCRUTINY UPDATE**

- 6.1 Ezra Wallace (Head of Corporate Strategy, Members' Services) informed the Commission of the outcomes of the Centre for Public Scrutiny development session, which had taken place on 30 September, and invited Members to consider whether more targeted training was required to develop specific skill sets or capabilities.
- 6.2 The Commission noted that work planning for the year ahead had begun, and that a list of prospective issues would be circulated in the New Year for comment. The Commission discussed future ways of working, and agreed that Westminster's scrutiny process could be more ambitious; with larger single sessions looking at cross-cutting issues such as air quality, which impacted on the environment, health and young people. Commission Members also suggested that the City Council's statutory duty to scrutinise organisations such as the NHS could be extended to other partners; and that Ward Budgets could be used to commission and support scrutiny which could promote Ward priorities and influence policy.
- 6.3 The Commission also discussed the greater use of pre-meeting seminars and grounded topic-based briefings on specific issues; the creation of joint Task Groups; the work of Parliamentary Select Committees, and contributing to other scrutiny networks, such as London Councils and the GLA.

## **7. MARK EW BANK**

- 7.1 The Commission noted that Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Manager) would be leaving the City Council at the end of December, on secondment at the House of Commons. The Commission wished to record their thanks for the valuable work he had undertaken in the development and support of the Scrutiny process in Westminster.

**8. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

8.1 The Meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_

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