



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Tuesday 11th December, 2018**, Westminster City Council, City Hall, Room 3.6/3.7, 3rd Floor, 5 Strand, WC2 5HR.

Members Present: Councillors Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Tony Devenish, Paul Dimoldenberg, Jonathan Glanz and Karen Scarborough

Also Present: Councillors Nickie Aiken (Leader of the Council), Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Sara Sutton (Director of Public Protection and Licensing), Aaron Hardy (Scrutiny Manager) and Reuben Segal (Acting Head of Committee and Governance Services)

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg had replaced Councillor Adam Hug.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations made.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2018 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

4 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

- 4.1 The written update from the Leader of the Council set out matters of corporate interest which included: (1) Westminster Community Contribution (2) Parental Leave policies (3) Support for EU Nationals and (4) My Westminster Programme.
- 4.2 The Leader stated that since the local elections in May the Council had taken strategic decisions in a number of key areas. These included future plans for the Oxford Street district, returning the Council's housing management functions currently overseen by CityWest Homes back in-house and considered and taken forward recommendations of an independent review of

the Council's development planning service. It had also launched a consultation on the Council's overarching development plan. She thanked officers for their hard work on these Council priorities over the preceding months.

- 4.3 The Leader and the Chief Executive then responded to questions from the Commission.
- 4.4 Westminster Community Contribution – The Leader was asked whether those residents that had made a voluntary contribution had received information on how their money is being used. She was also asked whether the Council would consider extending the scheme to Band G properties and businesses. With regards to the City of Westminster Charitable Trust (COWCT), Members asked whether any consideration had been given to appointing an independent trustee with a background in the voluntary sector in order to provide a broader perspective to the Trust's work. Questions were also asked about whether a dedicated web-page exists to promote the Trust's work.
- 4.5 The Leader of the Council informed Members that letters had been sent to all of those that had made donations, as well as all those in Band H properties that had not, setting out how the donations received had been distributed. The Leader stated that she had been delighted by the response to the scheme to date as it had been launched during Purdah where there was a restriction on publicity. She confirmed that the Council has written to Band G properties and that she would consider how the scheme can be expanded to other stakeholders in Westminster.
- 4.6 The Chairman, who is a trustee of the COWCT, commented in the respect of the scheme that there is a need for a clear separation between the responsibilities, duties and activities of the Trust and that of the Council. He explained that the Trustees had met earlier in the day to review the Declaration of Trust to ensure that the Trust is fit for purpose given its increased activity following the launch of the Council's scheme. It had recruited a dedicated officer to manage its finances and administer the voluntary donations received. Trustees had agreed to appoint an independent person and set up a dedicated web-page which will highlight its work and set out the projects that funds collected through the voluntary contributions have been allocated to. Trustees will meet quarterly to review progress. The next bidding round for funds will be in January and February.
- 4.8 With reference to the priority project to provide support for rough sleepers, Members referred to the new Hotel School initiated by Jeremy Goring as a scheme of merit that provides vulnerable people with experience of work in the hospitality trade. The Leader advised that she had visited the School and was very impressed with its work. She advised that the Director of Economy was assisting Mr Goring to locate larger premises in the borough as capacity at The Passage, where the school is located, had been exceeded
- 4.9 Parental Leave Policies – The Commission welcomed the review of the Council's Parental Leave policies and the decision to increase the maternity leave allowance to 26 weeks full pay, followed by 26 weeks half pay. The

Leader was asked about the pay implications if a member of staff leaves the organisation part way through their maternity leave. Stuart Love explained that the Council would not expect an employee to pay back any maternity allowance received, however, no further payments would be forthcoming.

- 4.10 In a supplementary question, the Leader was asked whether the Council was considering paying staff the London Living Wage. The Chief Executive reported that no one working directly for the Council is paid below this threshold. He stated that many of the Council's contractors pay above the London Living Wage without reference to a specific policy set by the authority. Requiring all contractors to do so would come at a significant price. Very few other local authorities require this. Therefore, the Council is not losing contract staff to other authorities. However, the Council is asking contractors to consider this when re-letting contracts.
- 4.11 City Lions – The Leader was asked how many of the 60 businesses that had been approached to support the work strand of the project had responded. Members were informed that this aspect of the project was in its early stages. John Nolan has been recruited to run the project full time. More businesses were becoming involved each week in support of the scheme and offering different work experiences to young people in Westminster.
- 4.12 Community Engagement – In response to questions about providing reassurance to and engagement with residents, Councillor Aiken stated that there is a clear desire by the electorate for politicians to listen more. This was most clearly evident in discussions around Brexit. She stated that the Council cannot scope out policies if it does not know what residents' concerns and hopes are. She highlighted that a clear message had been received during the recent local elections regarding the future of Oxford Street and the Council had listened and responded to this.
- 4.13 The Leader then responded to questions regarding the challenges to Westminster's economy. She stated that the retail industry had been significantly impacted by the rise in online shopping and in the approach to Christmas by the heavy discounting associated with "Black Friday!". The Council had recognised that the initial proposals for Oxford Street did not respond to the retail community's ongoing needs. Additionally, visitors were not coming into the area in the same numbers as they once did. The Oxford Street District Strategy recognises that a different experience that goes beyond retail is needed for the area.
- 4.14 The Commission raised concerns about the potential impact on the four tube stations that serve Oxford Street due to the delay in the opening of Crossrail. They asked about what impact this may have on the Council's Oxford Street District Strategy. The Leader stated that the Council knew that Crossrail would not open in December 2018 and its strategy has been developed in such a way so as to reflect this. She doubted that the project would open in early 2020 as currently projected. Stuart Love stated that the Council is currently consulting stakeholders on the strategy and a report on this will be presented to Cabinet in February and will include more detail on what is planned for 2019. He acknowledged the ongoing impact of the Crossrail

delays to businesses which included road closures and general construction. The Council was working closely with the BIDS to minimise the impact.

- 4.15 The Commission asked for an update on taking forward the recommendations arising from the Planning Review. The Chief Executive advised that the final two workshops with amenity societies were due to take place in the following days. Following this, the feedback from all consultees will form the basis of recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning. A protocol for public speaking at Planning Applications Sub-Committees to commence on 12th February will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration in January.
- 4.16 The Chief Executive was asked to provide an update on issues of corporate interest that he raised when last before the Commission in June. Mr Love highlighted the ongoing reduction in project funding to London local authorities by the Mayor of London and TfL as a concern. He also highlighted cooperation with the Council in relation to street and road activities as an issue. Other issues related to the limited Government funding for Adult Social Care. He stated that his biggest concern related to Police funding and the reduction in Police numbers and the rise in youth violence.
- 4.17 The Leader of the Council stated that she had recently met with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner who stated that she is committed to having CCTV that is being funded by the Council in operation in key areas in the next few months.
- 4.18 With regards to questions about the increase in youth violence, the Leader explained that she had been instrumental in establishing the Integrated Gangs Unit in 2012 to address concerns about youth violence, particularly in the North West of the borough. The unit, which brought together a range of agencies, focused on giving young people choices and routes away from gangs. Whilst significant strides had been achieved, she felt that the situation had deteriorated over the last year and was particularly affected by “County Lines” issues. This was affecting many London boroughs. The Council is making efforts to address this and there had been some improvements. However, she highlighted that funding from the Mayor of London to support this work had been reduced by 60% over the last two years. She had lobbied alongside other local authorities for an increase in funding and whilst the Council has been given some additional money this has not replaced the amount that was lost. Other London local authorities with more serious challenges, particularly in the North East of London have fared even worse.

5 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS UPDATE

- 5.1 Sara Sutton, Director of Public Protection and Licensing, introduced the report which provided an update to a report that was provided to the Commission in 2017 on the Council’s response to the Grenfell Tower fire and also the terrorist related incidents that took place that year.
- 5.2 The report addressed specific areas of interest to the Commission: The role of elected members in emergency preparedness and current activity to raise awareness of emergency planning and business continuity with residents and

businesses. It also set out the implementation of measures to improve resilience and preparedness across London and locally.

- 5.3 Members asked about the process for circulating the Guide for elected Members and how it would be kept up-to-date. Sara Sutton advised that subject to any comments that the Commission had on its contents the Guide would be circulated to all members of the Council. The Council is working with colleagues to develop a pan-London approach to Member training. Specific training will be provided to Cabinet Members regarding arrangements relating to their particular portfolio. The Commission requested that the Guide is deposited in an online location which is easy for Members to find.
- 5.4 Members asked about the process for de-briefing Councillors after an incident has occurred. The Chief Executive advised that a number of internal briefings take place following an incident. Officers hold a de-brief session with the emergency services. In relation to elected Members, Cabinet Members are de-briefed. Sara Sutton advised that the lessons from the incidents that took place in 2017 had been included in last year's report to the Commission.
- 5.5 The Commission asked officers for their views about the creation by the Mayor of London and the GLA of the London Watchkeeper Service which is a 24 hour emergency management centre to bolster the City's response to terror attacks and major disasters. Members commented that the justification for the change appeared to relate to concerns that some London Local Authorities (LLA's) are not able to meet the strategic gold standard challenge of responding to such emergencies. Members expressed concern at the change as it will potentially alter the role of individual boroughs. The Chief Executive stated that the Mayor of London and the GLA had been frustrated that they had been unable to respond directly to the Grenfell Tower fire. Whilst he acknowledged this frustration, he was firmly of the view that the Mayor of London and the GLA are not best placed to direct such activities as the resources sit within the individual authorities. Additionally, whilst some LLA's might be less capable of responding in such circumstances, those in inner London, including the Council, were better prepared generally.
- 5.6 The Director of Public Protection and Licensing was asked whether the Council has contingency arrangements in the event that the Council's IT infrastructure is impacted to the extent that it is unable to relay information and coordinate an emergency response. Sara Sutton advised that the Council has a robust IT disaster contingency plan. Moreover, the Council has moved to cloud based technology so is not as reliant as it was in the past on infrastructure in the event that this is impacted in an emergency.
- 5.7 Members referred to the fact that in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire many people had wanted to offer assistance but did not know how to do so. Sara Sutton was asked about the role of the voluntary sector in emergency planning arrangements and whether there had been any engagement with them. She was also asked whether contingency plans included the provision of interpreting services given the wide range of languages spoken in the borough. Sara Sutton stated that these issues had been discussed as part of a peer review of the Council's emergency planning arrangements and that

consideration to them would be given in light of the unique characteristics of Westminster.

5.8 ACTIONS:

1. The Committee would like to receive a bi-annual update on emergency preparedness.
2. Provide Councillor Glanz with a copy of the Council's IT Disaster Contingency Plan.
3. Provide Councillor Dimoldenberg with a copy of last year's report to the Committee which includes lessons learned from incidents that occurred in 2017.

(Actions for: Sara Sutton, Director of Public Protection and Licensing)

6 WORK PROGRAMME 2018-2019 AND ACTION TRACKER

- 6.1 Aaron Hardy (Policy and Scrutiny Manager), presented a report on the Work Programme for 2018-2019 and invited Members to confirm the items for the next meeting on 28 March 2019.
- 6.2 **RESOLVED:** Agreed to receive a report on the results of the staff survey and an update from the Chief Executive at its next meeting. The latter to include details of the Council's contingency planning in relation to Brexit.

The Meeting ended at 7.32 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____