



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Westminster Scrutiny Commission

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Thursday 1 October 2020 at 6.30pm**, via TEAMS.

**Members Present:** Councillors Karen Scarborough (Chairman), Iain Bott, Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Tony Devenish, Adam Hug and Gotz Mohrindra.

**Also Present:** Councillor Rachael Robathan (Leader of the Council), Gerald Almeroth (Executive Director of Finance and Resources), Lee Witham (Director of People Services), Anne McCann (Head of Property Delivery), Aaron Hardy (Policy and Scrutiny Manager), Lizzie Barratt (Policy and Scrutiny Officer) and Sarah Craddock (Senior Committee and Governance Officer).

#### 1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to the membership.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3 MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 1 July 2020 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

#### 4 LEADER'S UPDATE

4.1 Councillor Rachael Robathan (Leader of the Council) provided a verbal update and responded to questions on matters of corporate interest, which included:

- the local incident rate of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population in Westminster that had been consistently below the London and National averages. (On the 1 October the local incident rate had declined to 24.3% per 100,000 cases against a London average of 36.3% and a national average of 59.2%).

- the location of the three new testing sites at **Greenside Community Centre and the Central Area Housing Office, Lilestone Street, Lydford Tenants Residents Hall and Grosvenor Hall** and the mobile testing unit at **Paddington Green**. The Committee noted that the Hyde Park testing site was currently testing around 200 people per day.
  - the encouraging news that the positive testing rates had dipped again with 4% per 100,000 population being tested positive within Westminster compared to the London average of 4.5% and the national average of 5.6% per 100,000 population. The Committee noted that the positive testing rates were used as an indicator of the likely future direction of the virus.
  - the Council's continued support for the Hospitality Industry to remain open whilst maintaining the right balance for residents and the environment.
  - the progress of the Climate Emergency Programme and the possibility of encouraging central government to allow appropriate solutions around glazing to be installed in heritage/listed buildings to reduce the 86% emissions from buildings.
  - the future direction of the Movement Strategy which allows people and traffic to move around Westminster safely.
  - the importance of the West End in terms of an economic driver for Westminster as well as the national economy, the measures being taken to encourage visitors back to the West End such as the Sight See Crowd Free Campaign and the Government's short-and long-term response to business rates.
  - the importance of identifying and working with hard to reach/vulnerable communities to promote the public health messages regarding COVID-19.
- 4.2 Other issues discussed were the clustering of people outside of licensed venues after the 10pm curfew and Westminster Connects,
- 4.3 The Commission noted and thanked the Leader for the Council's support for the residents, the hospitality industry and the economy in Westminster during these exceptional times and for the additional testing sites which would give residents confidence that they could obtain a test if they need one.
- 4.4 **ACTION:** That the list of additional COVID-19 test sites be sent to Members.

## 5 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 The Committee received a report proposing how Policy and Scrutiny Committees and Task Groups could take advantage of technology and digital platforms to carry out further engagement with the public. The Committee heard that Parliamentary Select Committees in the UK were regular users of social media and that each Select Committee had its own Twitter account that regularly tweeted about its work.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed ways in which effective engagement could be carried out more generally such as using data to understand what the public thinks and carrying out more in-depth research with face to face engagement outside of meetings. The Committee further discussed the different ways scrutiny could be promoted using platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and the advantages of using the Council's in-house communication team which already had an active audience. The Committee considered that scrutiny could get involved and fit into the council's wider consultation process which would inspire residents and stakeholders to get involved with scrutiny as the consultation topics would be relevant and of interest to them that would conclude with an outcome and implementation. The Committee further considered that the future use of technology such as ZOOM and TEAMS would further encourage people to take part in meetings and that it was important to actually send out invitations to stakeholder to attend scrutiny meetings.
- 5.3 **ACTION:** That the data on how many people watch Policy and Scrutiny meetings by forwarded to the Commission.
- 5.4 **RESOLVED:**
1. That the scrutiny officers work with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to develop Westminster's scrutiny function.
  2. That the four Policy and Scrutiny Chairman meet with senior officers to discuss the future direction of scrutiny in the Council.

## 6 USE OF COUNCIL OFFICE SPACE POST COVID 19

- 6.1 The Council received a report outlining the response and actions taken by the Corporate Property and People Services teams to support the response to COVID-19.
- 6.2 The Committee heard how the Council had responded to the immediate impact of the pandemic and the resulting lockdown which included: supporting services to safely close their buildings, ensuring public conveniences remained open and free, implementing new arrangements to support the directive for staff to work from home and converting the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of City Hall as an operational centre for the BECC and the production and distribution of hot meals to the homeless and PPE to staff and care homes.

6.3 The key themes that emerged from the Commission discussion were:

- the actions taken to support staff working from home such as supplying them with office furniture and IT equipment and the initiatives such as weekly town hall meetings, counselling and internal communication that had been introduced to promote the importance of the well-being of staff.
- the importance of acknowledging that some officers were unable to work from home because of sharing accommodation with other young professionals, lack of space, poor band width and mental health issues and the importance of having and maintaining Covid-19 safe offices.
- the importance of investing and reviewing the future working patterns of individuals and teams and their accommodation/office/IT requirements for efficient agile working.
- the possibility of doing a piece of work on mapping where officers live/travel in to work from by the People Services Team.
- the opportunity for the Council to provide a range of services using shared spaces and maximizing public buildings including City Hall and Lisson Grove.
- the corporate property review programme of all Council's assets including the Council's current accommodation at City Hall and Lisson Grove and the proposal for a new Health and Well Being Hub at Lilestone Street.
- the valuable support that the Council had given the voluntary community sector during the pandemic.

6.4 Other issues discussed were the Parliamentary Estates renting City Hall office space and the staff survey that would inform the Council how it was doing regarding the well-being of its staff.

6.5 **ACTION:** That mapping of where Westminster City Council's staff live/travel in to work from be carried out by the People Services Team.

6.6 **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Council offices had been adapted and set up to comply with government guidelines for Covid-19 secure buildings be noted.
2. That the results/data from the staff survey be sent to the Commission.
3. That regular updates on the Corporate Property Review Programme be sent to the Commission.

## 7 WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

### 7.1 ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKERS

7.1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Action and Recommendation Trackers be noted.

## **7.2 COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME**

### **7.2.1 RESOLVED:**

1. The Commission agreed to review Emergency Planning and Business Continuity in Westminster at its November meeting.
2. The Commission agreed to meet four times a year (instead of twice) and five times if required.

## **8. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

- 8.1 The meeting ended at 8.04pm.

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

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