



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Cabinet

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at 7.00pm on **Thursday 25th October, 2018**, Room 3.1, 3rd Floor, 5 Strand, London, WC2 5HR.

**Members Present:** Councillors Nickie Aiken (Chairman), Ian Adams, Heather Acton, Richard Beddoe, David Harvey, Tim Mitchell and Rachael Robathan

**Also Present:** Councillors Angela Harvey and Gotz Mohindra

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Andrew Smith

#### 1 WELCOME

- 1.1 The Leader welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Leader extended her thanks to Steve Mair, who was retiring, for his outstanding work to the City Council, and the wider public sector, and for leaving the organisation in a better shape than when he arrived.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Angela Harvey declared a prejudicial interest in respect of item 5 that she is a Board Director of the CityWest Homes.

#### 3 OXFORD STREET DISTRICT - DRAFT PLACE STRATEGY AND DELIVERY PLAN

- 3.1 Barbara Brownlee, Executive Director, Growth, Planning and Housing, introduced the report. She summarised the outcome of engagement with stakeholders since the last Cabinet meeting in July to inform the development of the draft Place Strategy and Delivery Plan. She then outlined the direction of travel and key themes and features that had emerged and were set out in the draft strategy.
- 3.2 Barbara Brownlee informed Cabinet that the Council had commenced works on Phase 1 of the Oxford Street District Programme last week. These works

will address a number of underlying footway and highway maintenance issues in readiness for the opening of the Elizabeth line.

- 3.3 Councillor Richard Beddoe, Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning recommended that Cabinet endorse the draft Place Strategy and Delivery Plan for public consultation. He stated that the case for change on Oxford Street is compelling. The Council had listened very carefully to the views of stakeholders over the summer. He explained that the overall ambition is to strengthen the world renowned status of the entire Oxford Street district. This includes securing the long term future of the retail sector which is facing pressures from online retailers. This will be achieved by enhancing the district as a destination zone with an unrivalled experience and visitor offer.
- 3.4 Councillor Heather Acton welcomed the district wide proposals and considered the scheme to be cohesive. She particularly welcomed the proposals for the 98 bus to continue running along the full length of Oxford Street. She hoped to see more than four bus routes remaining on Oxford Street. Councillor Beddoe advised that Transport for London is responsible for the capital's bus routes and will ultimately make the decision on the routes and frequency of services running along Oxford Street.
- 3.5 Councillor Adams welcomed the proposals which he considered to be bold and ambitious. He stressed the important role that Oxford Street plays in supporting the wider UK economy as well as London. He suggested that the strategy should include additional provision for pedestrians to traverse the area around Marble Arch which was presently quite challenging. Councillor Beddoe agreed this would be a priority.
- 3.6 The Leader thanked Barbara Brownlee and her team for the considerable work that they had undertaken in a short space of time to develop the proposals.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet:

1. Endorsed the draft Place Strategy and Delivery Plan for public consultation commencing on 6<sup>th</sup> November.
2. Agreed to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing and the Director of Place Shaping and West End Partnership to approve the final public consultation materials for approval by the Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning.
3. Approved expenditure of up to £2.5m for the development of the strategy and the project as outlined in section 8 of this report. This will be funded via an Oxford Street/West End budget as per the Capital Strategy approved by Full Council in March 2018.
4. Approved the re-profiling of the existing Oxford Street/West End budget of £2.5m from 2019/20 into 2018/19.

## Reason for Decision

1. The Council believes that the District would benefit from adopting a place-based approach to determine how to deal with the current and future opportunities and issues. Owing to the complexities of the District, a more responsive approach to developing a range of solutions across the area needs to be adopted. The Council supports the need for a mixed use District and one that places strong emphasis on the amenity of its local residential communities. All this is essential if the District is to continue to thrive. The Council has now developed a draft Place Strategy and Delivery Plan for the Oxford Street District.
2. The Council's commitment to the Oxford Street District is to create a long term and ambitious vision for the whole of the District that will strengthen its world-renowned status as a great place to live, work and visit. Its strategy will support the ambition and respond to the big challenges that the District faces, including: a rapidly evolving retail environment; a place that can cater to a greater numbers of people; providing more attractions; and for Oxford Street to be a better neighbour to the wider district. In the wake of strong competition from retail hubs like Westfield; online shopping; increased business rates; Brexit; and interest rates, the retailers and businesses in the district are finding the trading environment very challenging.
3. The Council will take responsibility for delivering an ambitious set of projects that are affordable but also help to bring about a significant change that will help to counter some of the external factors that the District currently faces. The Council recognises that investment in the District is required in order to retain its status as the nation's high street and a world-renowned destination for domestic and international visitors. It is also essential that investment helps to improve the liveability of the district and provide a greater amenity for our residents. On 7th November 2018, Full Council will be asked to approve the Council's Capital Strategy including allocation of £150 million towards the delivery of the final adopted Place Strategy and Delivery Plan. Additional funding to support the delivery of the final projects listed in the draft Place Strategy will be required from other external sources. The coherent and district wide programme will ensure that Oxford Street District strengthens its reputation.
4. The Policy context relating to this report include the Council's City for All and City Plan policies. The draft Place Strategy reflect these policies and will contribute to delivering these over the lifetime of the project. See appendix 2 for the policies and how the Place Strategy will deliver these.

## 4 PLANNING REVIEW

- 4.1 Councillor Richard Beddoe, Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning, introduced the item. He referred to the fact that upon her election as Leader, Councillor Aiken implemented a comprehensive change to the management of the planning system in Westminster. He referred to the independent review of Westminster's Development Management service undertaken by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and highlighted that it had concluded that the Council has a robust planning system, however, it is a reactive, development control led service. It also highlighted the fact that whilst the governance and decision making processes are robust, they are not seen as accessible by residents. Councillor Beddoe stated that Westminster City Council needs to be more ambitious and proactive. The review further concluded that there is a need to improve engagement with residents and the wider community in the planning and decision-making process related to development in their area.
- 4.2 Councillor David Harvey advised that a number of applications in his ward could have been resolved much earlier if there had been more engagement with the community at a much earlier stage.
- 4.3 Stuart Love, Chief Executive, referred to the fact that the PAS review found no impropriety or failure to follow guidelines and protocols regarding hospitality. However, the practice of accepting hospitality from planning applicants was found to be excessive and unnecessary. Stuart Love made it clear that it was not the case that all officers in the planning service accepted gifts and hospitality. The Chief Executive advised that he had reviewed the guidance on gifts and hospitality together with the Director of Law and found it to be clear and robust.
- 4.4 The Leader commented that she had taken note of the views submitted by a number of amenity societies in the last few days on the proposed changes. She explained that the purpose of making changes to the management of the planning system in Westminster is to make the process more open and transparent. She considered that residents should have an opportunity to take a more proactive role at an earlier stage in the planning and decision-making process as well as the opportunity to make verbal representations at Planning Applications Sub-Committees. She stated that this will require a significant culture change for staff and those externally who use the planning system. She considered that further work is required to understand how to best implement the new procedures and that views should be sought from all those with a stake in the planning system in Westminster, most notably residents. This was supported by Cabinet.

### **RESOLVED:** That Cabinet:

1. Endorsed the findings and recommendations of the report submitted by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and agreed to take the following steps to:

- a) Improve the openness and transparency of the planning system:
  - We will record Planning Sub-Committee meetings and make the coverage available post-meeting;
  - We will live stream Planning Sub-Committee meetings once an appropriate technological solution has been identified and sourced;
- b) Make it easier for residents to engage with the planning system:
  - We will introduce “public speaking rights” at Planning Sub-Committee meetings;
  - We will review all our digital content on the planning process and planning decisions, particularly that included on the council’s website to improve accessibility for the general public;
  - We will improve the way we explain planning policies and decisions to make them easier to understand.
2. Agreed to support resident and ward Councillor participation at an earlier stage of the process, for example in the pre-application stage of major applications and to adopt a new approach to communicating and engaging their views in proposals. Further details are to be presented to Cabinet following further engagement with stakeholders.
3. Directed the Chief Executive, to present detailed plans to increase delegations and review the call-in procedures, in consultation with ward members as appropriate without the need for escalation to Sub-Committee, thereby speeding up the process. The details of the revised delegation and call-in procedures to be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and presented to Cabinet prior to submission to the Planning and City Development Committee for approval.
4. Directed the Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing and the Executive Director of Policy, Performance and Communications to submit a joint report to Cabinet setting out the detailed proposals for the introduction of public speaking rights following stakeholder engagement for approval by the appropriate decision making body, to be determined in consultation with the Director of Law.
5. (a) Directed the Chief Executive to restate to both officers and members their responsibilities in terms of the Council’s gifts and hospitality policies. This will include emphasising the importance of exercising sound judgement in dealing with all offers of gifts and hospitality. Noted that in terms of the planning service, this will build on the guidance issued in February 2017 regarding Councillor meetings with developers on particular schemes.

- (b) Requested that the Chief Executive and Director of Law refine the wording in the paragraph below to reflect that this should apply to elected Members involved in the planning decision making process. The revised text to be referred back to Cabinet at a later date

Council officers and elected members involved in the planning process must retain a distance from land owners, applicants, agents and community stakeholders, other than at formally arranged visits and recorded meetings linked directly and specifically to the consideration of planning applications, pre applications, or the development of the local plan.

- 6. Agreed to create a new Place-Shaping and Planning directorate which reflects the ambitious agenda set by the Leader and Cabinet to deliver a City for All, and for the new service to deliver the direction of travel which will be set out in the emerging City Plan.

### **Reason for Decision**

- 1. The Leader and Cabinet have set an ambitious agenda to change how the Council operates in a number of areas, including, but not limited to planning.
- 2. The direction of travel is to shift away from a largely reactive and development management focused planning service towards a proactive and strategic approach, guided by the Council's vision and priorities. This will require cultural change throughout the whole system.
- 3. It will also mean that, should they wish to, residents and others will have the ability to take a clearer and more proactive role in the planning and decision making process related to development in their area. This includes Neighbourhood Forums, Amenity Societies and the general public.
- 4. Work is ongoing to finalise the City Plan (the Council's Statutory Local Plan) for public consultation in November 2018. The revised City Plan will be streamlined and place much greater emphasis on positive considerations about the type of development that is appropriate in Westminster. The service which implements this policy framework must therefore also be governed by the same principles.
- 5. These recommendations are supported by the findings of the PAS report.

## **5 EBURY BRIDGE ESTATE RENEWAL - INITIAL REPORT ON DELIVERY OPTIONS**

- 5.1 Having declared a prejudicial interest, Councillor Angela Harvey left the room during the consideration of the item.
- 5.2 Barbara Brownlee, Executive Director, Growth, Planning and Housing introduced the report. She summarised the outcome of a high level appraisal

of the four delivery options for the Ebury Bridge estate renewal reported to Cabinet in July.

- 5.3 Councillor Rachel Robathan reported that an enormous amount of work had been undertaken over the summer by the finance and housing teams. She explained that Cabinet's support was being sought to undertake further engagement with the market and the Community Futures Group. The results of this which would be reported back to Cabinet at a future time. She stated that the Council had made a commitment to residents and tenants that the estate would be regenerated and she reiterated this commitment.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to support the initial selection of Council led delivery through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Westminster Wholly Owned Company (WOC) as the preferred delivery option for Ebury Bridge estate renewal.
2. Noted that the HRA/WOC option provides flexibility to amend the tenure mix of the market sale housing, as set out in Scenario 7 approved in July 2018, and to create hybrid delivery options. Engagement with the market will commence as soon as possible to test the feasibility and support for this delivery option and also for potential tenure changes and hybrid delivery options. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration will then be in a position to confirm the selection of the preferred delivery route.

### **Reasons for Decision**

1. The Ebury Bridge Estate is one of the five priority estates identified in the Council's Housing Renewal Strategy (2010) as needing significant improvement and investment. In line with the Council's City for All objectives, the overarching objective of regenerating Ebury Bridge Estate is to create a comprehensive renewal that brings about physical, economic and sustainable change that creates additional homes and improves the lives of residents, businesses and visitors alike.
2. In July 2018 Cabinet approved a regeneration scenario (Scenario 7) following detailed evaluation and consultation with residents. This report provides the first stage assessment of potential delivery options for that scenario.
3. Council led delivery through the HRA and WOC is viewed as the preferred approach following the high level appraisal described in this report. With Cabinet agreement, this now will be subject to more comprehensive assessment including:
  - consultation with residents and businesses,
  - soft market testing with the development/construction market,
  - further detailed feasibility work by the Council team.

The Meeting ended at 7.35pm

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

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