



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held virtually on **Wednesday 24th March 2021** at **18:30**, via Microsoft TEAMS.

Members Present: Councillors Gotz Mohindra (Chairman), Susie Burbridge, Lorraine Dean, Paul Dimoldenberg, Adam Hug, Murad Gassanly, Pancho Lewis and Emily Payne.

Also Present: Gerald Almeroth (Executive Director for Finance and Resources), Claire Barrett (Director of Corporate Property), Lizzie Barrett (Policy and Scrutiny Officer), Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Cabinet Member for City Management), Peter Hopkins (Assistant Director Commercial, Surrey County Council), Artemis Kassi (Senior Committee and Governance Officer), Raj Mistry (Executive Director for Environment and City Management), and Councillor Paul Swaddle (Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City).

1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to the membership.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

3 MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd February 2021 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

4 UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CITY MANAGEMENT

4.1 Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Cabinet Member for City Management) provided an update and responded to questions on matters relating to his portfolio, which included:

- the Oxford Street District;
- leisure and the reopening of leisure centres on 12th April and how EveryoneActive and the Council were engaging with members about rejoining;
- the Movement Strategy, including Active Streets and School Streets;

- reducing and minimising waste, including the pilot food waste scheme, associated costs, engagement with residents and the next phases of expansion of the scheme;
- the car sharing scheme;
- the issues concerning garden waste and tree cuttings;
- the Marble Arch Mound, including an update on costs, procurement, security, fees (to architects and later for dismantling), potential entrance charges and an imminent Cabinet Member Report relating to it; and
- the issues concerning social distancing, policing and related legislation when hospitality re-opened.

4.2 The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for his contributions.

5. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND SMART CITY

5.1 Councillor Paul Swaddle (Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City) provided an update and responded to questions on matters relating to his portfolio, which included:

- the Council's budget;
- engagement with culture;
- decarbonisation of the Council's estate;
- research into the causes of digital exclusion;
- the re-evaluation of assets, especially in relation to the proportion of staff working from home;
- the communication, increasing awareness and understanding of the Greener and Cleaner agenda, including carbon and climate literacy and funding from the retrofitting accelerator funding stream;
- the issues concerning Huguenot House, location of the proposed casino and modelling;
- the collection rates for council tax and business rates, as compared with previous years;
- the potential development issues relating to libraries, including Marylebone, Seymour Leisure Centre and the Queen Mother Sports Centre;
- the decision by Nova not to proceed with the final phase of the Nova development and the implications for Westminster libraries;
- the potential for provision of refurbished laptops to residents over the age of 65; and
- the Animation Strategy, including bringing art to Westminster streets and empty properties in the form of art installations and pop up retail.

5.2 The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for his contributions.

ACTION: A briefing note on the decarbonisation programme to be prepared for the Committee.

6. REPORT ON THE REGENERATION PROGRAMME

- 6.1 The Committee welcomed Peter Hopkins from Surrey County Council and invited him to give his reflections on the report on the Council's Regeneration Programme. Claire Barrett introduced the report. Peter Hopkins outlined the importance of the right "one front door" approach and commented on how the report successfully set out the Council's drive towards rationalisation of infrastructure. Peter Hopkins compared and contrasted the approach being taken elsewhere, including at Surrey, which had seen the sale of the council offices and resulted in a move back to Kingston. He also commented on the challenges in the post-Covid context for Surrey, particularly with the impact of Covid on Gatwick and Heathrow.
- 6.2 The Committee discussed issues arising from the report, including the repurposing of properties, the quality of public buildings in Westminster, the regeneration of Church Street (including Church Street Library), the decline in the number of local housing officers, ensuring that facilities are put to best uses, and strategies for bringing in secondary assets (such as former public toilets) into revenue generation.
- 6.3 The Committee was advised that the purpose of the rationalisation was to review the whole estate for underusage, to ensure that assets were reviewed, disposed of where necessary, returned to the purposes for which they were originally intended, as befitted needs, or have maximum use derived from them. The Committee also heard that this list did not constitute a disposal list. The Committee discussed the public facing aspects of asset review and how this would be conducted on a case-by-case basis within the evolving post-Covid context. The Committee also briefly discussed equalities and environmental issues around availability and accessibility of public toilets.
- 6.4 The Committee discussed wifi access for lower income households, particularly during the Covid-19 period. The Committee heard that fibre had been rolled out through the estates, including free wifi in community buildings and a variety of cost and length of contract options. Councillor Paul Swaddle advised that there would likely be an update provided at the Committee's September meeting.
- 6.5 The Committee further discussed the use of office space in City Hall, e-provision and behavioural changes relating to the holding of meetings electronically. Councillor Paul Swaddle reinforced the message that the Council policy would be "electronic by choice".
- 6.6 The Committee thanked Peter Hopkins for his attendance and his contributions.

ACTION: The Committee to receive an update on the WAES building situation and the Committee also to receive a briefing note update from Councillor Swaddle about the rationalisation programme (September 2021).

7. WORK PROGRAMME

- 7.1 The Committee discussed its work programme for the remainder of the municipal year 2020 to 2021.

7.2 **RESOLVED** that:

- the agenda for the next meeting be finalised offline.

8. TERMINATION OF MEETING

8.1 The meeting ended at 20:13.

Next meeting scheduled for: 29th April 2021

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____