



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy & Scrutiny Committee 10 May 2021

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy & Scrutiny Committee** held virtually on Monday 10 May 2021 at 7.00pm via **Microsoft Teams**.

**Members Present:** Councillors Andrew Smith (Chairman), Antonia Cox, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Ian Rowley, Barbara Arzymanow, Guthrie McKie, Matt Noble, Hamza Taouzzale

**Also Present:** Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration), Malcolm Davidge (Chair, Mayfair & St James's Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panel), Lizzie Grumbach (Lord Mayor's Office), Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Artemis Kassi (Lead Scrutiny Advisor/Statutory Officer), Raj Mistry (Executive Director of Environment & City), Elizabeth Virgo (Chair Little Venice Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panel / volunteer at the Metropolitan Police Service), Superintendent Michael Walsh (Metropolitan Police Service).

#### 1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 No changes to the membership and no apologies received.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No further declarations of interests in respect of items to be discussed were made.

#### 3. MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 be approved for signature by the Chairman as a true and correct record of the proceedings with the below amend:

That the Membership for the minority party constituted Councillors Matt Noble, Hamza Taouzzale and Guthrie McKie, as a correction for the names listed (Councillors Paul Dimoldenberg, Aisha Less and Pancho Lewis).

#### **4. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES**

4.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) on key issues within his portfolio. The Committee discussed the following topics in detail:

- the current trialling underway of Smart Homes Technologies in homes and on Westminster estates, including automatic leak detection sensors in order to deal with problems prior to emergencies occurring.
- the Churchill Gardens Estate and the shared space innovation, including the opportunities and support being given to vulnerable residents to ensure that service users receive the help needed to sustain their tenancies and how to find the right links to community involvement.
- the rise in anti-social behaviour on Westminster's housing estates and how this was being addressed, including the new legal procedures and referral pathways.
- the current rough sleeping levels in Westminster, including current low rates of rough sleeping and how the Council was exerting considerable pressure on the Government for additional funding.
- the current use of public buildings as Covid-19 testing centres and when the return to intended use was planned.
- the building of new housing stock and the placement of residents where anti-social behaviour issues were involved.

4.2 The Committee discussed anti-social behaviour and was advised about challenges with the allocation policy, including that the framework needed revision.

4.3 The Committee was advised by Councillor David Harvey that the decision about the return of use of public buildings following their use as Covid-19 testing centres would come from the NHS. Cllr Harvey confirmed that he would update when the NHS intended to release the sites.

**ACTION:** Cllr Harvey to update when community centres will be released from NHS from usage as Covid-19 testing centres.

#### **5. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND REGENERATION**

5.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration) on key issues within her portfolio. The Committee discussed the following topics in detail:

- the successful planning permission for Ebury where several new homes would be built.
- the consultation in Church Street and the visits to infill sites.
- the good working relationship between WCC and the Metropolitan Police Service, which had improved over the lockdown period and the increase in frequency of meetings largely enabled by being able to meet virtually.
- the increase on knife crime and strategies for dealing with it. This included the policing schemes in place and the interaction with community organisations, and the work being done across borders with Brent and RBKC.
- the progress of building new housing stock.
- the Council's regeneration programme and how to ensure children have the best possible pathways.
- the future of Westminster Connects.
- the air quality in Westminster Schools and how parents were being informed about the measures.

5.2 The Committee heard that the new housing stock programme was going well and that a large number of new homes were being built. The Committee was also advised about the investment in early years intervention and the work being done with schools to prevent serious youth violence, which was resulting in a positive impact.

5.3 The Committee heard that for Westminster Connects, whilst the priority had initially been Covid-10 focused, a number of volunteers were now being linked into Business As Usual (BAU) volunteering. The Committee was advised that the Council was keen to maintain this and to offer other opportunities, with great enthusiasm and backing from individuals, BIDs and businesses. Concerning air quality measures in schools, the Committee also heard about the monthly environmental newsletter and how schools and parents were being encouraged to sign up to receive it.

**ACTION:** Cllrs Acton and Harvey to provide a report on the regeneration programme and the progress of building new housing stock for a future Committee meeting.

## 6. REPORT OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE

6.1 The Committee received a report by the Metropolitan Police Service on policing in Westminster. The Committee welcomed Superintendent Michael Walsh (Head of Neighbourhoods Policing, Metropolitan Police Service) to present the report. The Committee also welcomed the following Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panel Chairs: Elizabeth Virgo (Little Venice), Malcolm Davidge (Mayfair and St James) and Frances Blois (Knightsbridge and Belgravia). The Committee discussed the report, including the decrease in crime as a result of the Covid-19 lockdowns.

6.2 The Committee held a discussion where the following themes emerged:

- the sustainability of decreased crime rates as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns. They heard how the partnerships between the Met Police, local authority and business community have been strengthened.
- the challenges faced from the increases in large gatherings during Covid-19 and issues arising.
- the Harrods incident and whether this could be replicated elsewhere in Westminster. They heard this incident was specifically linked to Harrods.
- knife crime, in particular specific types of knives being used. They heard about the different types of knives and how the Met Police are discouraging people from carrying knives of any type by working with gangs and youth engagements teams to communicate this.
- the new approach to stop and search with a view to reducing anxiety amongst communities by uploading to social media. They heard that the officers conduct stop and search with professionalism, integrity and respect, therefore building trust and confidence.
- the projected future patterns of crime once the phased emergence from the Covid-19 lockdown. They heard that inevitably crime will rise as we come out of lockdown and will further increase when full tourism returns to the West End. The ambition is to control crime to a level lower than pre Covid-19. Members heard about the dedicated West End policing team who are working with BIDs and additional assets from across the Metropolitan Police Service.

6.3 The Committee acknowledged the dedicated work of those involved in various ways in policing within Westminster.

## **7. REPORT ON THE WARD BUDGET PROGRAMME**

7.1 The Committee received a report on proposed reform of the ward budget programme.

7.2 The Committee held a discussion on the following topics:

- the steps being taken to revitalise and relaunch engagement and communications around the ward budget programme targeting different forums.
- the changes seen over lockdown period.

7.3 The Committee heard that the Ward Budget had faced new demands, but that the pattern had been for funding requests for smaller events as groups had had fewer opportunities to organise events and spend money.

7.4 **RESOLVED:** The Committee noted the report.

**8. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME REPORT**

- 8.1 The Committee reviewed and discussed its work programme for the municipal year ahead. The Committee also discussed rescheduling its next meeting, currently scheduled for 9 June, to a date in early July.
- 8.2 The Committee agreed to examine air quality at its next meeting and that additionally directorates would be canvassed for suggested items for future meetings.
- 8.3 The Committee noted the Work Programme report.

**9. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

- 9.1 The meeting ended at 9.21pm.

CHAIRMAN \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_