



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

**Communities, Regeneration and Housing
POLICY and SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14th October 2021
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held in person on 14th October 2021 at 7.00pm and livestreamed via **Microsoft Teams**.

Members Present: Councillors Jim Glen (Chairman), Barbara Arzymanow, Antonia Cox, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Matt Noble, Ian Rowley, and Hamza Taouzzale.

Expert Witnesses: Simon Birkett (Founder and Director, Clean Air in London), Rob Day (Asthma UK), and Professor Frank Kelly (Imperial College London).

Also present: Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing), Lewis Aaltonen (Policy and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director for Growth, Planning and Housing), Ceridwen John (Head of Environment Policy and Projects), Artemis Kassi (Lead Scrutiny Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Hannah Small (Policy and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator), Adam Webber (Principal Policy Officer, Air Quality), and Ezra Wallace (Director of Policy and Projects).

Election of new chairman: Before proceedings began, the Committee held a vote to determine which of the two nominees (Councillors Jim Glen and Matt Noble) would serve as the future Chairman of the Committee. Councillor Jim Glen was elected as the Chairman of the Committee, having received a majority of 1 at the vote.

AGENDA PART 1

1. MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 Councillor Liza Begum joined the committee, replacing Councillor Guthrie McKie. Councillor Jim Glen joined the committee, replacing Councillor Andrew Smith.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Liza Begum. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Jim Glen declared that he was Chair of Governors for a school near Victoria, and was also the Chair of a Planning Committee, which occasionally imposed conditions around the Code of Construction Practice.
- 2.2 Councillor Jim Glen also declared he was a Westminster cycling champion. These declarations reflected possible interests, as the main agenda item for discussion was around Air Quality in Westminster.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th July 2021 would be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. REPORT ON AIR QUALITY IN WESTMINSTER

- 4.1. The Committee received a report from Ceridwen John, Head of Environment Policy and Projects, and Adam Webber, Principal Policy Officer, on air quality in Westminster.
- 4.2. The Committee welcomed three expert witnesses: Professor Frank Kelly of Imperial College London; Simon Birkett, Founder and Director of Clean Air London; and Rob Day, from the air quality policy team at Asthma UK.
- 4.3. The Committee was informed of the two major pollutants that made up poor air quality: Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}).
- 4.4. The Committee discussed the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the effects that the national lockdowns had had on air quality in Westminster. It was noted that while levels of NO₂ decreased over the course of the national lockdowns, levels of PM_{2.5} did not.
- 4.5. The Committee agreed that while outdoor air quality should continue to be a priority for the Council, indoor air quality should not be ignored. During the lockdowns, residents cooked more frequently at home. Cooking can produce PM_{2.5}.
- 4.6. The Committee was provided with information around the clear link between air quality and public health. Evidence indicates that morbidity, as well as rates of dementia, birth weights, and respiratory and cardiovascular implications are all results of living with poor air quality.
- 4.7. The Committee noted the tragic death of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah. The Coroner's report listed one of the causes of her untimely death as living with poor air quality. The Committee welcomed the knowledge that this fact was beginning to shift the attitudes of authorities to prioritise this matter.
- 4.8. The Committee agreed that the promotion and encouragement of active transport, cycling, electric vehicles and e-scooters within Westminster should remain a top priority. While great strides had been taken by the Council in promoting greener transport, more could and should be done and targets should be more ambitious. The Committee welcomed the suggestion that Council promotion of these modes of transportation should be positive in nature, rather than scolding of those who do not choose them.

- 4.9. The Committee discussed the Code of Construction Practice and how it applied to construction and refurbishment in Westminster. The consideration of air quality as a key component of construction was noted as necessary. The Committee considered the matter of refurbishment of buildings in Westminster, even those which are currently Listed and so must be preserved in keeping with their original architecture and build quality; it was agreed that finding ways to improve upon the energy efficiency of these buildings, for example by implementing double or triple glazing on windows, should be explored.
- 4.10. The Committee discussed the recent change to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines on acceptable air quality, which are much more stringent than both previous WHO guidelines and also existing national limits. The Committee accepted that these new guidelines, while not currently legally binding, should be considered morally binding, and should be treated as a minimum requirement for safe air quality. The crux of the discussion was that in essence, no level of pollutants in air is safe.

5. WRITTEN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND REGENERATION

- 5.1. The Committee received a written update from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration. Members were asked to submit questions in writing directly to the Cabinet Member.

6. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

- 6.1. The Committee received an update from David Harvey, Cabinet Member for Housing, focusing on current and upcoming issues in his portfolio. The Committee discussed matters including:
- 6.2. The Council's programme of work to make Westminster's housing stock carbon neutral and ensuring that new builds in Westminster are highly rated for energy efficiency.
- 6.3. Anti-social behaviour incidents across Westminster and the impact these have on residents and the wider community. Members referred to an ongoing incident of anti-social behaviour and asked what enforcement measures were the Council's disposal.
- 6.4. Fire safety measures across Westminster's housing stock. Member's questions whether Freedom of Information requests were the most appropriate way of providing residents with risk assessments.
- 6.5. The Afghan relocation settlement scheme and the support the Council are providing to Afghan refugees. The Cabinet Member stated that Westminster should be proud of the support that has been made available to Afghan refugees in need.
- 6.6. The support available to the 193 households receiving a negative homelessness application. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that

the Council was providing advice to these households as well as signposting them to other support agencies.

6.7. The roll-out of Broadband across Westminster's housing stock, the Committee were informed that 90% of stock had a Broadband connection installed from at least one supplier as of 31st August.

7. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

7.1. The Committee discussed its work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The Committee raised that youth violence and exploitation should be added to the future work programme, and that a task group should be created to tackle this issue specifically.

7.2. The Committee agreed that January of 2022 would be an apt time for the Committee to discuss rough sleeping, due to the additional support measures that may be forthcoming from authorities in the winter months.

7.3. The Committee asked if the allocation policy could be brought to Scrutiny at the next Committee meeting. Scrutiny agreed to liaise with Officers.

7.4. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for the 17th November 2021. The Committee were informed that the Cabinet Member decision on Church Street sites A, B, and C was Called In by Councillors on the 13th October. The Committee would receive further information on the proceedings of the Call In from Westminster's Scrutiny Team over the coming weeks.

8. TERMINATION OF MEETING

8.1 The Committee agreed that future meetings of this Committee would begin at 6:30PM, rather than 7PM. The meeting ended at 9.10pm.

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____