



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

**Communities, Regeneration and Housing
POLICY and SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17 November 2021
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held in person on 17 November 2021 at 6:30pm 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), Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration), Lewis Aaltonen (Policy and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator), Hazel Best (Principal Solicitor), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director for Growth, Planning and Housing), Anthony Jones (Asset Investment Manager), Artemis Kassi (Lead Scrutiny Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Raj Mistry (Executive Director of Environment and City Management), Jim Paterson (Divisional Head of Housing Property), Gavin Ridgewell (Senior Client Programme Manager), Hannah Small (Policy and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator), Jeff Tourmentin (Senior Construction Manager) and Neil Wightman (Director of Housing)

AGENDA PART 1

1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 No changes were made to the membership of the Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest made.

3. MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2021 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND REGENERATION

- 4.1. The Committee received an update from Cllr Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration, focusing on current and upcoming issues from the portfolio.
- 4.2. The Committee discussed matters including:
- the Autumn nights in Westminster. The Committee queried the outcome of the restricted sale of fireworks for 5 November (Bonfire Night) and the number of young people involved in incidents during that period. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that the reports were excellent and that it had been one of the quietest “autumns nights” periods on record, though there had been some incidents in central London against the Police which involved fireworks.
 - HMO Licensing. The Committee raised queries regarding the decision not to proceed with the licensing of section 257 and instead focusing on section 254. The Cabinet Member advised that extensive consultation and research had been undertaken before taking the decision where they discovered a large number of 254 HMOs which were occupied by our most vulnerable residents and where 80% of the housing stock had a serious hazard which should be rectified with some urgency.
 - community events – Black History Month. The Committee queried if there would be any additional events taken place throughout the year. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that there was a number of events planned with the new Director of Communities and the council would continue to celebrate the diversity of our communities across the year.
 - an Ebury Bridge Regeneration update. The Committee queried the smoothness of the handover from JF Hunt to Bouygues UK and the impacts of the changes on the local community. The Cabinet Members advised the Committee that they were happy with the way that JF Hunt had interacted with the community and that they had been very supportive. The Cabinet Member informed the committee that the council hope to have a similar relationship with Bouygues.
 - an update on nuisance from vehicles update. The Committee sought clarification of the effectiveness of the acoustic cameras and the data to evidence the cameras’ effectiveness and enforcement. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that the cameras were not in use, they were being used to gather data, but that the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) had not yet been signed. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the enforcement had been effective, however, consequently there had been some displacement.
 - community protection. The Committee sought clarification on the number of unsavoury businesses and “candy stores” with out-of-date stock penetrating Oxford Street. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee

about enforcement actions against out-of-date products and that there would be a future operation Jade on Oxford Street again to target these types of businesses.

- 4.3. The Committee also raised queries regarding drug dealing/taking and the Council's protocol on dealing with residents who see and report drug incidents. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that it is a Police matter, and that the Police need residents to report incidents so that the Police can collect the data and allocate resources.

5. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

- 5.1. The Committee received an update from Cllr David Harvey, Cabinet Member for Housing, focusing on current and upcoming issues from the portfolio. The Committee discussed matters including:
- Leverage Energy Efficiency Measures in Housing. The Committee sought clarification with regards to the Cleaner and Greener agenda on the outcome if the Council were not awarded the £3m match funding grant for fabric first retrofit works. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that he was fairly certain that the Council would receive the funding. Cllr Harvey noted that, if the Council did not receive the grant, it did have some money for the works, but it would also require some borrowing.
 - the Pimlico District Heating Undertaking (PDHU). The Committee queried if there were any plans to reduce the PDHU's use of gas and diesel. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that there were a number of initiatives happening to ensure that the PDHU's carbon neutrality and a keen focus on also keeping the cost to residents neutral.
 - Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) updates. The Committee queried the number of incidents and how the approach was working. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that it was using different court orders, more mediation and considering the types of tenancies that could be used to support in dealing with ASB matters.
 - Flooding and Council housing stock. The Committee raised queries regarding flooding and the impact that it has had on the Council's housing stock. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that there were a number of properties that had water ingress issues and that the Council was planning a number of major works programmes between now and 2027 to resolve these problems.
 - the repairs reporting system. The Committee sought clarification with regards to the Council's housing CRM, system for reporting minor and major repairs and adaptations. The Cabinet Member advised that, from his knowledge, the CRM system should be able to differentiate between the two issues and any major/urgent issue should be prioritised and be dealt with swiftly.
 - Temporary Accommodation (TA). The Committee sought clarification in respect of the increase in homelessness applications and the Council's

ability to provide accommodation for those people and whether this meant that those people would be given temporary accommodation outside of Westminster. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that TA forms an orderly queue based on how long the person had been waiting and the greatness of their needs. The Cabinet Member advised that the Council worked with other boroughs to find accommodation to ensure that people were housed.

- 5.2. The Committee queried how the housing repairs satisfaction survey statistics were collated as the numbers were impressive, however there appeared to be a discrepancy with case work.
- 5.3. The Committee discussed Lisson Grove and the closure of Greenside Community Centre. The Committee sought clarification of the Cabinet Member's ability to reopen the Centre. The Committee also queried the completion dates for the major works programme for Hallfield Estate window replacement. The Cabinet Member advised that there had been a delay due to Covid-19, however these delays were now under control and the programme was back on track and due to complete by August 2023.
- 5.4. The Committee asked the Cabinet Member to comment on housing options for young people. The Cabinet Member advised that there were some options such as shared ownership, however Cllr Harvey felt that there needed to be a more detailed conversation and welcomed further discussion.

6. CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME IN RELATION TO HOUSING

- 6.1. The Committee received a report from Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing) and Jim Paterson (Divisional Head of Housing Property) on management of the Capital Works Programme in relation to Housing. The Cabinet Member also introduced Jeff Tourmentin (Senior Construction Manager), Gavin Ridgewell (Senior Client Programme Manager) and Anthony Jones (Asset Investment Manager). The Committee discussed matters including: the arrangements where the Council had agreed two preferred contractors and whether this still held value for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and leaseholders.
- 6.2. The Committee also sought clarification in regard to the risk surrounding Axis. Officers explained that all works under the contract were "open book", which allowed the Council to review and ensure pricing was comparable with market costs, therefore they were confident that the contracting arrangements were still delivering value for money.
- 6.3. The Committee sought clarification on the timescale for the decarbonisation of the PDHU. Officers advised that this would be at least one year away as there was a large amount of investigation that needed to take place before the works could start.
- 6.4. The Committee queried how the Council supported sustainability whilst decreasing the carbon footprint of the Council's housing stock. The Committee also queried the agility of the programme when faced with the complexity of Covid19, the impact of Brexit on labour and increasing material

costs. With regards to sustainability, officers discussed the roof and windows programmes in balance with the Council's future plans. Officers also discussed the Construction Leadership Council and designing out future risks and using control measures. Officers also advised the Committee on the recruitment and apprenticeship programmes for the construction industry.

- 6.5. The Committee queried the Capital Programme and Fire Safety delays and what the current status was given that the recommendations had been made regarding implementing the fire safety measure to the Council's housing stock. Officers advised the Committee that the programme had been reprioritised and there was a separate fire and safety committee. Officers further advised that there was a programme where work was prioritised and was on track.
- 6.6. The Committee queried service charges and the communication with residents as to how and when the money was being spent. The Cabinet Member agreed that information could be made more clear for residents, and this was under his review.

7. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

- 7.1. The Committee received a report on its work programme and discussed work programme topics for the remainder of the municipal year. The Committee were advised that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for 26 January 2022.
- 7.2. The Committee was informed that the main item for the next meeting would be the Allocation Policy and Affordable Housing.
- 7.3. It was agreed by the Committee and Cabinet Members that reports on Anti-Social Behaviour and Rough Sleeping would be heard in March 2022.

8. CHURCH STREET, SITES A, B AND C - CALL-IN

- 8.1. The Committee received a call-in for the Church Street Sites A, B and C Cabinet Member Decision. This decision was called in for review by three ward members. The Chairman advised that, in light of the information before the Committee, the report for call-in contained confidential appendices concerning matters under Section 100 (A) (4) and paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act (1972) (as amended).
- 8.2. The Chairman reminded members that any discussions of, or questions relating to, the confidential appendices should not take place in the public session; and that Committee members should reserve questions relating to the exempt appendices until private session, if necessary.
- 8.3. The Chairman advised that it was the Committee's role to scrutinise the reasons for the decision and that Committee members had the choice to either confirm the decision or to send it back to the Cabinet Member for reconsideration.

8.4. Councillor Matt Noble presented the reasons for the call-in: including height and density, environmental impact, community space and private sales.

Height and Density

8.5. Councillor Noble explained to the Committee that the scheme proposed buildings of up to 10 storeys along Church Street and up to 13 storeys (all plus barrel vaulting) behind. Cllr Noble highlighted that it was felt that the impact of this would be to alter the character of the area almost completely and would also have a serious impact on Church Street Market. It was noted that, although there was a wind microclimate assessment, this did not refer to the market at all.

8.6. Councillor Noble advised the Committee that Church Street was already the most densely populated ward in London, and the number of residents would increase (and therefore density alongside it) substantially as large schemes were constructed. He noted that the population density in the ward received barely a mention in any of the documents accompanying the Cabinet Member Report.

8.7. Councillor Noble further observed that there was ample evidence of increased population density having negative effects on metrics, such as physical and mental health and happiness but also on issues such as crime. Councillor Noble stated that Church Street was also one of the most deprived wards and therefore the impact would be more keenly felt. Councillor Nobel asked:

- what assessment was undertaken of the consequences of further increase in population density in Church Street Ward; and
- at any point whether consideration had been given to applying for Mayor of London funding, which would have allowed delivery of more affordable homes without the need for as many private market homes.

Environmental Impact

8.8. Councillor Noble advised the Committee that the Cabinet Member Report stated that the City for All agenda was being enabled by being 'Cleaner and Greener', however demolition of five entire blocks as well as a number of street properties followed by the construction phase would create significant carbon emissions which were not acknowledged in the EIA or HIA reports. Cllr Noble noted that the HIA stated that there would be a shortfall in achieving zero carbon emissions which would have to be met through a cash-in-lieu contribution (whereby WCC would likely be paying WCC).

Community Space

8.9. Concerning, community space including the Church Street library, Councillor Noble explained that, with an increase in population, there should also be an increase in the amount of space given to the communities for their own recreation, enjoyment and development. He advised that the space allocated for the library however was significantly less than what was afforded at present. Cllr Noble further observed that this too did not seem to marry up with the City for All agenda which committed to supporting people's mental wellbeing by creating active environments through, for example, recreation facilities.

Private Sale

- 8.10. Councillor Noble felt that the City for All agenda recognised the effects of the pandemic on low-income residents, among other hard-hit groups, and committed to building homes for Westminster to be inclusive at all income levels. He advised the Committee that the price of a one-bedroom flat within private market sale properties built in the Council's own developments in nearby schemes was as follows:
- The Masefield on Shirland Road - £635,000
 - Carrick Yard (the Luton Street development) - £720,000+
 - Venice Court on Edgware Road - £655,000+
- 8.11. On the figures above and based on a 10% deposit of £63,500 for the cheapest flat, a single person or a couple would need an income of between £115,000 to £142,000 to be able to get a mortgage. Anyone with children or wishing to start a family would need much more for a two-bedroom property.
- Assuming a similar price point for the 50% of all new homes in this scheme which would be for private sale, how was Westminster City Council meeting its City for All commitments for housing?
 - What steps would Westminster City Council take to ensure these properties were not used by individuals or businesses to park cash obtained by suspicious methods or obtained in places where there was little regard for the rule of law?
- 8.12. Councillor Heather Acton introduced the report responding to the call-in reasons and also introduced Debbie Jackson (Executive Director, GPH) to present the report with Setareh Neshati (Head of Development), Shama Sutar-Smith (Programme Director) and Serena Simon (Director of Communities, I&C).
- 8.13. Councillor Acton advised the Committee that 80% of respondents felt positive or somewhat positive about the proposals for the Church Street Market. She added that this high rate reflected the work that the project team had been conducting with the residents and community groups.
- 8.14. Councillor Acton informed the Committee and the members of the gallery that the plans for the library had been amended to include a mezzanine floor to increase the size and flexibility of the space.
- 8.15. Councillor Acton further advised the Committee that, in order to achieve 50% target of affordable homes, the building height and density were necessary. With regard to the environmental impact, Councillor Acton informed the Committee that in terms of carbon zero, the design had adopted measures under each of the heads of 'be lean', 'be clean' and 'be green', as detailed in the City Plan, enabling a site wide reduction in regulated carbon emissions of 61%.
- 8.16. The Committee discussed: the trade-offs for ensuring the quality of the project and the number of residents that the scheme would house. The Committee also queried the policy regarding tall buildings in light of Grenfell Tower (RBKC), the number of properties that would be council-owned and the likelihood of those decanted residents moving back into the new Church Street Scheme. Officers advised the Committee that, in the context of

London, the height of the building was comparative, and the Council had taken on board the lessons from Grenfell Tower. Officers also confirmed 50% affordable housing in line with planning of which 60% would be intermediate and 40% would be social housing. It was noted that all council tenants would have the right to return.

8.17. The Committee sought assurances that enough services would be available for the scheme, especially access to schools and GP surgeries. The Cabinet Member confirmed that there would be adequate school places and GPs, and that this was addressed with the additional community spaces.

8.18. The Chairman invited the Committee to vote to note the report or proceed with referral to the decision-maker. The Committee voted as follows:
In favour of noting the report: Councillors Arzymanow, Hitchcock, Cox, Glen, and Rowley
In favour of referral back to the decision-maker: Councillors Begum, Noble and Taouzzale

8.19. **RESOLVED:** that the Members of the Committee note the report.

9. TERMINATION OF MEETING

9.1. The meeting ended at 9.20pm.

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____