

FUTURE OF WESTMINSTER COMMISSION| TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Future of Westminster Commission is established to advise the Council on areas of policy that are critical to the future success of the City. The Commission will seek to review and make recommendations on the delivery of key council services to deliver a fairer Westminster for residents.

The Commission will have four strands of enquiry, namely:

Housing: To increase the supply of genuinely affordable housing to meet housing need in the city. To improve the way the council responds to homelessness and housing need. To improve the quality of services provided to the council's own tenants and leaseholders.

Fairness and Equality: To identify policy approaches and initiatives that will enable and deliver a fairer, more equal, and inclusive City.

Economy and Employment: To enable more Westminster residents to share in the City's economic successes.

Energy and Green Transition: To enhance and accelerate climate action supported and delivered by the Council across the city towards the objective of achieving net Zero Westminster by 2040.

These four strands will be convened and led by members of the Commission supported by separate review teams.

The Future of Westminster Commission

The full Commission will:

- Receive regular reports on progress from the Convenors of the separate reviews and consider and comment on their work programmes and recommendations.
- Ensure integration between the separate reviews and the overlapping elements within them.
- Use meetings to engage directly with communities across the city and identify opportunities for co-production and community participation in the reviews.
- Ensure the work of the Commission and its reviews takes proper account of the need to ensure their recommendations do not inadvertently disadvantage anyone and, wherever possible, advance equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The full Commission will also have a particular focus on giving citizens and communities a far greater say in Council decisions and services and how the Council operates.

It will review:

- The Council's approach to consultation on policies and service delivery seeking to ensure this is done in an equal and reciprocal partnership with communities and residents.

- The Council's relationship with and support for the voluntary and community sector, including contracting and funding arrangements, developing, and supporting community hubs and expanding community ownership.

The Commission will report to the Leader of the Council and wider Cabinet and will engage widely with residents, local organisations, businesses, independent experts, academics and think tanks, other authorities, the Mayor of London, and central government departments. The Commission will be an active advisory body which will communicate its conclusions and recommendations to the Council through advisory notes, reports and presentations.

The Commission will be supported directly by the Chief Executive. The Commission is designed to be advisory to the core decision making processes of the Council, informing the future of service design and policy with final decisions reserved to the Executive or other bodies as necessary, and according to the Council's Constitution.

The Commission and its members will work with the person or body which has delegated authority within the Council to direct resource to the work undertaken by the Commission.

Housing Review

The Housing Review will initially focus on three separate priorities:

- How to increase the supply of genuinely affordable housing to meet housing need in the city. This review will be undertaken by the main Housing Review team.
- How to improve the way the Council responds to homelessness and housing need. This work will be undertaken by a joint group established by the Housing Review team and the Fairness and Equalities Review team.
- How to improve the quality of services provided to the Council's own tenants and leaseholders. This work will be undertaken through a 'Tenants Jury' made up of invited tenants and leaseholders, members of the Housing Review team, together with the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing Services.

Housing Supply

The purpose of the Housing Supply review is to examine and analyse the factors that limit the Council's ability to deliver sufficient social and truly affordable housing in Westminster and to advise and make recommendations to the Council on strategy and measures to meet Westminster's housing needs.

The Housing Supply review team will work collaboratively with Cabinet Members and Council Officers to:

- Review the capital resources available to the Council for supporting and enabling the increased delivery of social and intermediate housing and identify any new and additional sources of funding to meet this objective.

- Review the different forms of intermediate housing and recommend the most suitable form to pursue in Westminster having regard to local circumstance.
- Review the Council's new build and regeneration programmes and where possible, identify any scope for increasing the delivery of social and truly affordable housing, considering the financial implications for the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund.
- Review the Council's delivery arrangements for its new build and regeneration programmes, including the wholly owned company, Westminster Builds and the registered provider, Westminster Community Homes. Advising on the most effective arrangements for delivery and the management of these programmes, including the staffing resources required.
- Identify and advise on other ways to increase the supply of affordable housing, in particular, through the acquisition of properties and land for development.
- Advise on housing needs across the City and how the Council's planning policies and guidance could be amended and developed to raise the proportion of affordable housing from private developments to meet those needs.
- Review the performance, stock management and development plans of Registered Social Landlords operating in Westminster and advise on how the Council can work with them to increase their provision of affordable housing.
- Advise on delivering an effective strategy to identify and bring vacant properties and stalled development sites back into use.

The Review team will provide recommendations on:

- Maximising funding into the Council's delivery of affordable housing and all possible options for delivering additional homes for social or genuinely affordable rent.
- The best approach to the Council's planning policies to enable more affordable housing to meet housing needs in the city.
- How Registered Social Landlords can best support delivery of affordable housing to meet housing needs in the city.
- An empty homes strategy for the Council.

Homelessness and Housing Need

The purpose of the Homelessness and Housing Need Review is to analyse and challenge the Council's current strategy to better meet housing needs and identify better ways to support residents who need a home.

Other strands in the Housing Review will help the Council to improve the supply of genuinely affordable homes, which, long term, is the only sure way to address the city's homelessness crisis.

The Homelessness and Housing Need review team will work collaboratively with Cabinet Members and Council officers to:

- Review each element of the Council's existing homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, making recommendations to the Council on improved practices and services.

- Review the Council's use of temporary accommodation and make recommendations to reduce the number of people housed far away from Westminster, improve the quality of accommodation, and provide more support and assistance to households affected, including better liaison with receiving boroughs.
- Review the Council's use of private rented housing to discharge the Council's duty towards homeless households, recommending approaches to reduce dependence in the longer term.
- Review the advice, prevention and support services for homeless households and recommend improvements.
- Encourage housing-first solutions and work in partnership with the London Mayor and voluntary organisations to improve support services for rough sleepers and to develop new training employment and housing initiatives to tackle the problem.
- Review Westminster's allocations policies and recommend innovative approaches to maximise the Council's ability to meet the range of housing needs, including the contribution made by housing associations.

Housing Management

The purpose of the housing management review is to improve responsive repairs and major works performance, local service delivery and responsiveness to residents, offer better value for rent and service charge payers, deliver more effective engagement with council tenants and leaseholders giving them more say over decisions that affect their homes and estates.

The review will establish a 'Tenants Jury' made up of a majority of tenants and leaseholders working with members of the Housing Review and the Cabinet Member and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing Services.

The Tenants Jury will:

- Review the structures for resident participation to give residents a stronger say over how their homes are managed and make recommendations on issues such as: support for independent resident organisations, establishing a borough-wide representative body, and consultative mechanisms such as an annual residents' conference and other forums, encouraging new forms of management such as tenant co-operatives and greater resident control.
- Review the best means of securing better and more responsive services. This includes re-establishing estate offices, providing named housing officers, better advisory and information services, and more effective telephone and online contacts.
- Review and advise on a range of policies that impact on tenants. This includes terms of tenancies and access to transfers along with the review of multi-agency services for residents such as anti-social behaviour and pest control.
- Review the Council's approach to maintaining and improving the housing stock. This includes responsive repairs, fire safety, major works and standards on reletting, advising on a new repairs charter and compensation arrangements and identifying urgent repair issues to be tackled through a prioritised repairs plan.
- Recommend the adoption of a new leaseholders' charter covering consultation, charges, major works procurement, and complaints.

- Consider the resources available to the Council through the Housing Revenue Account and otherwise.

Economy and Employment Review

The purpose of the review will be to enable more Westminster residents to share in the city's economic successes. The review will examine the effectiveness of current programmes and projects in achieving this mission and support a programme of development and change for the Council's economic development services.

It will develop an Economic Opportunity Plan for a series of high impact, short term initiatives that will contribute to addressing structural inequalities in Westminster's economy and form part of a new Economic Development Strategy for the Council.

The review will be informed by an evidence base of Westminster's current economic and employment position and will work collaboratively with Cabinet Members and Council officers to consider in particular:

- How to develop skills, employability and coaching initiatives to create economic opportunity for local residents particularly those with the highest need for support and those from disadvantaged communities.
- Strengthening the Council's social value and business community partnership approach to increase residents' share of economic success.
- Increasing the effectiveness and accessibility of business and enterprise support with a focus on supporting businesses to offer innovative opportunities for residents.
- Initiatives to support local high streets allied to promoting economic and other opportunities for neighbouring residents with an initial focus on the Harrow Road between Royal Oak and Queen's Park Library.

Energy and Green Transition Review

The purpose of the review will be to enhance and accelerate climate action supported and delivered by the Council across the city towards the objective of achieving net Zero Westminster by 2040.

The review will identify opportunities to influence and engage with partners from across Westminster and beyond; focus on common barriers to delivery including technological or financial and establish partnership working to develop solutions; identify pilot or collaborative project opportunities.

The review will work collaboratively with Cabinet Members and Council officers to focus on:

- Efficient buildings, including how to drive investment in building decarbonisation at scale, address the skills shortage in retrofit and harness the full opportunity of the planning framework to drive zero carbon developments and achieve retrofit first.
- Clean and affordable energy, including how to increase the availability of local, low carbon energy sources, empower communities to develop viable local energy projects and decarbonise the Council's own energy sources including PDHU.

- Sustainable travel and transport, including the potential role of a local/pan-London zero emissions zone and how to promote active travel, balancing the infrastructure with restricted space and wider transport demands.
- Behaviour changes required to support a net zero 2040 vision, including how to create long-lasting, sustainable behavioural change, support residents, visitors, and workers to make those changes, for example by supporting recycling, and harness the Green Economy opportunities for our residents and workers.

Fairness and Equality Review

The purpose of the review will be to identify policy approaches and initiatives that will enable and deliver a fairer, more equal, and inclusive city.

The review will be informed by an evidence base of data on Westminster's communities and citizens and will examine the effectiveness of existing Council policy and programmes that seek to meet the needs of more disadvantaged communities.

The review will identify new initiatives and recommendations for action by the Council and its partner organisations to tackle poverty and financial hardship, improve opportunities and life chances for the most disadvantaged residents and review how Council policies and resource allocation reflect the diversity of the City.

The review will work collaboratively with Cabinet Members and Council officers to focus on:

- Measures to address the cost-of-living crisis and food and fuel poverty including access to advice and advocacy and food support to families and children.
- Early years provision and access to affordable childcare.
- Young people and access to early help, including support for vulnerable families, youth services and addressing gangs and serious youth violence.
- Improving the quality of life in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of our city, including addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, access to sport and leisure and improving the local environment.
- Building healthy communities and addressing health inequalities, including improving the physical and mental well-being of older residents, and tackling loneliness and isolation.