



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 13th March, 2024**, Rooms 18.01-03, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Concia Albert, Paul Fisher (virtual), Angela Piddock (Chair), Tim Mitchell, Caroline Sargent, Paul Swaddle and Jason Williams.

**Also Present:** Stella Abani (Director of Economy and Skills), Catherine Brice (Programme Director of Economy and Skills), Siro Carraro (Westminster After Dark Stakeholder Assembly), Mike Dunn (St James's and Mayfair Residents Association), Adam Hug (Leader of the Council), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director of Regeneration, Economy and Planning), David Kaner (Covent Garden Community Association), Councillor Aicha Less (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, Children and Public Protection), Tim Lord (The Soho Society), Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Clare O'Keefe (Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Kerry Simpkin (Head of Licensing, Place, and Infrastructure Policy), Pamela Vythelingum (Westminster After Dark Stakeholder Assembly), Ezra Wallace (Director of Policy and Projects), Mark Wiltshire (Director of Public Protection and Licensing).

#### **1 MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.1 The Committee was pleased to note that Councillor Caroline Sargent had joined the Committee's membership.
- 1.2 The Committee noted that Councillor Paul Fisher was attending the meeting virtually.

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3 MINUTES**

- 3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting on 14 December 2023.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 3.2 That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings, subject to the amendments discussed offline.

#### **4 WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025**

- 4.1 The Committee noted that this meeting was the last of the municipal year and the next meeting will be held on 2 July 2024. The Committee noted that the work programme for the next municipal year will be discussed after the annual Cabinet Member Update meetings in April, but understood that suggestions are welcomed at any time.
- 4.2 The Committee expressed disappointment that it had not received two of the information requests noted in the Committee Tracker, and had only recently received a response to the third request. The Committee made reference to the amount of time that had passed since the information had been requested at the previous meeting on 14 December 2023 and asked that the information is supplied with haste, and in a timely manner in the future.

#### **ACTION:**

- 4.3 That outstanding actions on the Committee Tracker will be followed up, and timely responses given in the future.

#### **5 POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- 5.1 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Climate Action, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Jason Williams. The Committee was updated on the following:
- The Committee met on 29 February 2024 and scrutinised two items.
  - The Committee scrutinised the Sustainable Transport Strategy, which included the overall changes to the strategy, road safety and air quality.
  - The Committee also scrutinised the Pimlico District Heating Undertaking, having visited the site before the meeting, and discussed the plans including leaseholder charges and the importance of keeping local Councillors updated.
- 5.2 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee, and the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, Councillor Paul Fisher. The Committee was updated on the following:
- At the last meeting of the Committee, Members considered Temporary Accommodation (TA). The Committee noted that TA had become a significant pressure point for the Council, in the Housing Service as well as the Budget.
  - The Committee meeting was felt to be productive as long-term and short-term strategies to manage the issue were discussed.
  - The Committee raised concern of the short notice periods that the Home Office provide when considering successful asylum seeker applicants.
  - The Cabinet and Full Council were provided with Budget Scrutiny Task Group updates which included changing the process to increase accountability by

bringing the process forward to the autumn and engaging and including direct scrutiny of Cabinet Members.

- The key risks noted by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group include TA, but the Group found the mitigations and planning for this risk robust.

5.3 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Vulnerable Adults, Health and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee, and the Inner North West London Mental Health Services Reconfiguration Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Concia Albert. The Committee was updated on the following:

- The meeting on 7 March conducted pre-decision scrutiny of Community Hubs which are at an embryonic stage and the Committee discussed the item returning to scrutiny at a more advanced stage in the autumn of 2024.
- The Committee was pleased that it was able to input on the development of this item.
- The Committee had a number of substitutes on the membership but the engagement and interest in this item was not negatively impacted by this, instead scrutiny was enriched by the enthusiasm and additional skills of those Members.
- The Inner West London Mental Health Services Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held five public meetings to scrutinise the proposed substantive change to mental health service provision by Central North West London Foundation Trust (CNWL).
- The meetings of the JHOSC provided constructive critical friend challenge, amplified the voices and concerns of the public, worked to drive improvement in public services and the cross-party group of Members came to their conclusions with an independent mind.
- The scrutiny process has not finished and both local authorities are committed to local resolution.
- The JHOSC submitted its evidence-based and independent conclusions on Thursday 29 February 2024. It commented on the service reconfiguration proposals as well as the adequacy of the consultation.
- There will be further scrutiny of the outcomes of the consultation and the decision the Integrated Care Board makes in due course.

5.4 The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair of the Young People, Learning and Employment Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Angela Piddock. The Committee was updated on the following:

- The Committee received the Local Safeguarding Partnership Report, which was found by the Committee to be an impressive feat, and Members acknowledged the significant amount of work that goes into such an important area.
- The Committee also scrutinised the provision for migrant families and found that the support the Council provides is to be commended.

5.5 The Committee thanked Members and officers for their time in both developing and attending the Westminster After Dark site visits for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which took place on Friday 1 March and

Thursday 7 March in areas across the City after dark. The visits were noted as informative, interesting and increased awareness of certain issues relating to the evening and night time in Westminster.

## **6 LEADER'S UPDATE**

6.1 The Committee received an overview of the Leader's Update report from Councillor Adam Hug which included the process of setting the Budget, of which thanks were given to Councillor Fisher and the rest of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, the increased pressures from TA, the Cost-of-Living Crisis strategy, the extension of the Household Support Fund, lobbying for Short Term Lets and the publishing of the Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan.

6.2 The Committee asked questions on the following:

- Short Term Lets: concerns about the implementation of current regulations and those in the future which are not yet fully determined. The measures undertaken within the current regulations to respond to Short Term Lets which are used in excess of 90 days, the number of cases which have progressed beyond investigation, what the measures under the current regulations are, the importance of speaking to residents to gain evidence and demonstrate that action is still being taken, rather than waiting for the new regulations.
- TA: the ability of the Council to reconcile the significant pressure that TA represents and the administration's manifesto commitments to residents, and how this challenge is built into the Budget gap.
- Housing repairs: noting the consultation underway at present, whether the measures that are in place enable the Council to hold its repairs contractors to account effectively, the contractual commitments for the Council to performance manage effectively, the high bar to terminate contracts and how the Council will actively consider termination if necessary.
- Household Support Fund: whilst it is positive that the Council is working with local and national stakeholders to lobby the government to extend this, what are other organisations such as the Local Government Association and London Councils doing, and whether the Council reaches out to work with those organisations to support the lobbying of government.

### **ACTIONS:**

6.3 That the Committee will receive an in-depth update in the next report on the Cabinet's progress on the Council's environmental objectives.

## **7 WESTMINSTER AFTER DARK**

7.1 The Committee received a brief overview of the Westminster After Dark report from Debbie Jackson (Executive Director of Regeneration, Economy and Planning).

7.2 The Committee heard from representatives who spoke to how the Council can support and enhance Westminster's evening and night-time, whilst meeting the needs and aspirations of residents, visitors and night working community. The Committee was pleased to welcome and hear from Siro Carraro

(Westminster After Dark Stakeholder Assembly), Pamela Vythelingum (Westminster After Dark Stakeholder Assembly), David Kaner (Covent Garden Community Association), Mike Dunn (St James's and Mayfair Residents Association) and Tim Lord (Soho Society). The Committee invited Councillor Aicha Less (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, Children and Public Protection) for remarks in light of the contributions from the speakers.

### 7.3 The Committee asked questions on the following:

- Quality of life: whether the development of the Westminster After Dark strategy will adequately promote quality of life for residents, particularly those who live in close proximity to night time activity.
- Crime and public safety: addressing concerns relating to crime and public safety is important to recognise as well as the evening and night time economy strategy impacting on a cross cutting range of Council services and responsibilities.
- Cultural and educational activities: there should be an emphasis on developing the offer for cultural and educational activities across the City in an evening and night time economy strategy.
- City-wide initiative: addressing concerns that Westminster After Dark has too much focus on the West End, licensing and planning rather than Westminster as a whole despite there being other issues and needs across the City that should be addressed in a strategy. The strategy should not discount the West End but consider the diversity of the offer across the City.
- Marginalised groups: welcoming that engagement is ongoing, the representation of LGBTQIA+ in the engagement approach should be considered further and how gay women and trans groups should be specifically targeted as they are traditionally hard to reach but nonetheless are a part of the distinctiveness of the City.
- Rent: the high cost of renting establishments across the City in the evening and night time, and how this can fuel an alcohol-led evening and night time economy.
- The resident's voice: whether the resident's voice is being sufficiently heard throughout the process, including that of the Stakeholder Assembly through the sortition process.
- Next steps: the next steps that are due to be taken and the importance of this, especially regarding the extent to which views of the Stakeholder Assembly and stakeholder workshops are taken into account in the designing and implementation of the Westminster After Dark strategy, the constitution of the stakeholder workshops and how the process will be reported and agreed.
- Engagement levels: generally, engagement levels for Westminster After Dark can be viewed as low, especially for an economy the size of Westminster and raises concerns about the groups which are underrepresented, particularly visitors who live outside of the City.
- Data: there is a scarcity of data available at present to fully understand the huge variety of different needs in areas across the City, particularly at a ward level.
- Consultation adequacy: the adequacy of the consultation to capture those who are contributing to the evening and night time economy, such as those

who work in the evening and those who are engaging in the offer available. Equally as important is engaging those who do not participate in the evening and night time economy and why this is.

- Confidence in the process: how clarity and outcomes should be made clear to ensure that there is confidence in the process, the direction of travel the process is taking the strategy, the framework for the Council's services and the challenges this poses. The Council has a role to protect residential interests as well as the commercial health of the City and balancing these should be at the centre of any vision for Westminster After Dark.
- Impact of widening the evening and night time economy: there is a need to activate an increased offer for the evening and night time economy in more areas across the City but the impact of this should be considered. Whether issues such as increased waste and noise disturbances will be built into the strategy, and how model conditions should mitigate and complement the other.
- Barriers to participation: the importance of adequately engaging young and older people especially when considering the cultural and educational offer of the evening and night time economy in different areas across the City, and recognising the concern about the depth of knowledge of the Council-led programmes already in place, such as getting hard to reach children involved in cultural activities via the City Lions for instance.
- Night Stars: the importance and effectiveness of their work, as well as the work being undertaken to help make the evening and night time economy safer for women and girls.

7.4 The Committee thanked those who attended to speak for their time and noted that it was an open and interesting discussion.

#### **INFORMATION REQUEST:**

7.5 That the Committee will receive a breakdown of data from the consultation at a ward, or equivalent, level.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

7.6 The Committee recognised the wide array of stakeholders who have been engaged so far in the process and recommended that the Westminster After Dark engagement strategy also includes speaking to those who specifically engage in the evening and night time economy, during the evening and night time.

7.7 The Committee acknowledged that areas and communities in the City have different needs and visions of what Westminster After Dark should be. The Committee therefore recommended that barriers to participation should be investigated, specifically with the aim of ensuring that young, older and harder to reach stakeholders are adequately engaged as well as those who choose not to participate in the evening and night time economy with its present offer.

7.8 The Committee recognised that mitigating potential negative impacts of increasing the evening and night time economy offer would be considered and

recommended that it should remain central to a Westminster After Dark vision.

7.9 Whilst the Committee acknowledged that the process of developing a Westminster After Dark strategy included setting a vision, the Committee recommended that this vision should be clear, and the Council should continue to keep in mind a balance of interests at all time.

7.10 The Committee recommended that the final strategy should consider how different evening and night time events, particularly cultural events, across the City can be better promoted to broaden participation and, as part of this, that all evening and night time cultural and arts activities across the City are mapped to understand what is available and where there might be gaps in provision.

The meeting ended at 20:31.

**CHAIR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_