



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Climate Action, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Climate Action, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 29th February, 2024**, in rooms 18.01 – 18.03, 18th Floor Meeting Rooms, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Jason Williams (Chair), Jim Glen, Iman Less, Patrick Lilley, Tim Mitchell, Ed Pitt Ford and Judith Southern

Also Present: Councillors Liza Begum (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Paul Dimoldenberg (Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality), Ryan Jude (Cabinet Member for Climate, Ecology and Culture). Officers: Francis Dwan (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Daisy Gadd (Principal Policy Officer), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director of Regeneration, Economy and Planning), Anthony Jones (Head of Housing Sustainability), Frances Martin (Executive Director of Environment, Climate and Public Protection), Philip Robson (Director of City Highways), Chris Spicer (PDHU Programme Manager), Fiona Ugoji (Business Intelligence Strategy Manager) and Ezra Wallace (Director of Policy and Projects). External Guest Speaker: Dr Audrey de Nazelle (Senior Lecturer at Imperial College London)

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 There were no changes to the membership.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillors Jason Williams, Jim Glen and Ed Pitt Ford gave declarations in respect of item 6, the Pimlico District Heating Undertaking (PDHU). Councillor Williams outlined that PDHU falls within his ward boundary. Councillor Glen and Councillor Pitt Ford outlined that the PDHU serves residents and businesses in their respective ward too. It is therefore a subject of high interest and regular meetings for all three with their residents.

3 MINUTES

3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its previous meeting held on 16th January 2024.

3.2 RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2024 be agreed as a correct record of proceedings.

4 WORK PROGRAMME

4.1 The Committee acknowledged that this was the last meeting of the municipal year and that the first meeting of the next municipal year is on Thursday 20th June 2024, before which there will be a work programming session for Members of the Committee.

4.2 The Chair acknowledged that interest had already been voiced with regards to the air quality action plan before asking Members whether they wished to make any comments in relation to the work programme or committee tracker.

4.3 Members asked for an update on incomplete actions from the previous committee.

4.4 Action

1. To ensure that outstanding actions are adequately responded to.

5 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

5.1 The Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality, Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, introduced the report on Sustainable Transport Strategy, assisted by the Director of City Highways, Phil Robson. The Cabinet Member detailed how it was the first overarching strategy of its kind in Westminster, the timing for it and the key strategic pillars.

5.2 The Committee invited Dr Audrey de Nazelle, senior lecturer at Imperial College London, to introduce herself and provide an appraisal on the strategy outlined and the priorities that had been indicated. In a detailed analysis, Dr de Nazelle dissected various aspects of the strategy, giving praise and some critiques. Dr de Nazelle highlighted the importance of the evidence base, balanced against the importance of implementing solutions over developing understanding, she praised the planned engagement but expressed caution about the risks of hearing from a vocal minority, she made clear that the positive health benefits of active travel already supersede the risks of it and that growth and sustainability were not conflicting objectives.

5.3 The Cabinet Member, assisted by senior specialist officers, then received questions on:

- Air quality targets: particularly given the high incidence of respiratory illness and fatalities in Westminster, whether the Council was being ambitious enough on air quality improvement targets and if the fairly distant World Health Organisation (WHO) targets for 2040 might be achievable or beatable in a shorter timeframe.
- Electric vehicle (EV) charging points: whether the rollout of EV charging points would get harder as they become more saturated across Westminster.
- Active travel targets: the fairness of active travel targets, such as the Mayor of London's target that 80% of journeys in London be active by 2041, on the relatively small pocket of Westminster residents who may feel the need to drive. Members suggested that more could be done to accommodate and referenced those with mobility issues.
- Disincentivising EV owners: the impact the cost of EV public charging points was having compared to charging at home and the degree of unfairness for Westminster residents, many of whom do not have their own drives.
- Tackling idling: progress on tackling idling, particularly in coach stations.
- Co-design: the importance of co-designing the strategy with a wide range of residents and stakeholders to ensure resident take-up.
- Evidence base: understating the figures identified in the evidence base and querying some conclusions on green spaces and cycling collision statistics displayed. Members suggested that this could be expanded to paint a more detailed picture of where the City has come from and where the Council hopes to take it going forward.
- One-size-fits-all: whether the strategy risks being a catch all and the degree to which it could or should be tailored to different parts of the City to reflect major variations in relevant indicators such as car ownership. Members then asked whether this variation was a binary north/south divide across Westminster.
- Cycling numbers: understanding the inhibitors to cycling and how the Council could better encourage take-up, especially for women and children who are statistically less likely to cycle on the roads.
- Segregated cycle lanes: how important cycle lanes being segregated was to safety, perception and take-up.
- Census data: the reliability of the census data being used on the evidence base for car ownership, given its proximity to the pandemic, which was a transitional phase which may not be representative of today's conditions.
- Applications for recording activity: what other applications might be available for recording activity and how else the Council could record data.

- Flooding: how the Council's emergency preparedness could feed into the sustainable transport strategy in terms of reducing the risk of flooding.
- Provision of public bicycles: understanding how public bicycles in Westminster were spread across Westminster, why this is not proportional and why some areas, like the north of Westminster, had far fewer. Members asked what the cost of providing bays was to the Council and whether they could be increased at speed.
- Changing perceptions of transport: citing the statistic that 73% of women surveyed identified private car as the safest mode of transport, Members asked what the Council could do to make the City feel safer.

5.4 Actions

1. To clarify some of the statistics provided in the evidence base, particularly around access to green space split by ward and cycle collision statistics against the data displayed on the TfL dashboard.
2. To provide information on increasing rollout of 'Santander' bikes and any other notable developments such as their provision of E-bikes and the geographical spread of availability.

5.5 Recommendations

1. The Committee recommended that the Council consider zoning elements of the strategy across Westminster, to consider unique challenges that exist across the City, split geographically, such as varying degrees of car ownership for example.
2. The Committee recommended that the Council consider giving greater consideration to people who may have mobility issues and who may find moving away from car ownership (including EVs) more difficult.
3. The Committee recommended that the Council considers widening the evidence base to highlight the importance of the pillars and need for action.
4. The Committee recommended that the Council continue to co-design with partner organisations.
5. The Committee recommended that the Council be more ambitious on air quality targets and not limit itself just to WHO guideline level targets for 2040.

6 PDHU - OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE APPROACH

- 6.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Councillor Liza Begum, and the Cabinet Member for Climate, Ecology and Culture, Councillor Ryan Jude, introduced the report on the PDHU. Cllr Begum gave a summary of the resident working group that had taken place since publication of the papers, an outline of the timeline and referenced the appointment of a technical engineer to support residents. Cllr Jude ran through the options being

considered for the upgrade, referencing the lifespan of the network and emphasising the challenges that the Council is facing. The Cabinet Members, assisted by senior specialist officers, then were asked questions on:

- Timelines: understanding the timelines outlined, why they had been selected and whether they were realistically achievable. Members also asked what impact new technologies might have in the process and whether that might speed up proceedings.
- Individual metering: whether individual metering would come in before any decision on progress of the network. Members asked how this might work on a micro-scale and whether meters might have to be fitted to individual radiators.
- Leaseholder liability: the degree to which leaseholders will likely be financially liable for improvements to the network and the point at which this charge would be tendered. Members also asked how this might differ between residents and leaseholders.
- Risk of failure: how likely, without maintenance or expensive repairs, the current system could go down and the impact that would have on the 3000 properties currently serviced by PDHU.
- Estimating resident costs: Members asked for a projection on what it might likely cost individual residents when necessary improvements to the network are eventually done. Members also asked about caps on charges that could face residents and whether residents could potentially bear the cost of primary works as well as tertiary.
- Reporting to Policy and Scrutiny (P&S): whether the programme could come back to P&S when the direction of travel was clearer and the likely costs to residents could be better measured.
- Central government funding: the likely impact any central government funding might possibly have and the degree to which it could financially alleviate the potential burden on residents and leaseholders to pay for repairs.
- Leaseholder responsibility: understanding the responsibilities and liabilities that current leaseholders have that might wish to sell a property within the network.
- Timing of the project: given the network has operated well beyond the expected lifespan of the original piping, Members asked why this was a particular issue now and why it hadn't previously been resolved.
- Decanting protocols: how the Council could support residents who might have to move out during major works and what support would be given to older residents, particularly those living in supported accommodation, to minimise the disruption and inconvenience.

- PDHU decarbonisation: Members asked whether the title of the programme was still appropriate and whether it might risk closing off some viable options, that should still be considered.
- Integration assumptions: what assumptions had been made on integration of potentially new methods onto the network. Members also questioned the efficiency of transferring heat underground and under a riverbed and the degree to which that should be a concern.
- Cost responsibility: how responsible the Council would be in terms of cost of a likely new heat source, whether it could be more efficient to close and for private heat sources to be considered.
- Non-resident charging: what considerations were being made to business properties within the network and whether charitable units would be given any dispensation.
- Estate energy tariffs: clarity on why different energy tariffs in different estates was considered a disadvantage of options 5 and options 6 in the report, when on the face of it, that appeared a fairer solution.
- Projections on energy costs: what assumptions had been made in the forecast projections on energy costs going forward and the costs of capital going forward. Detail was also requested on the assumptions made in terms of estimated capital and energy costs in the forecasted cost analysis within the strategic outline case.
- Electric combi boilers: whether electric combi boilers could be installed far quicker and might be a potential solution and longwave radiation could be a good lower cost item.
- Affordability considerations: Members suggested that any option that works out to over £50,000 per household should automatically be discounted from the viable options.
- Transportation of thermal battery option: whether the Council would ensure that barges transporting thermal battery energy would run on electricity rather than diesel.
- Zero-carbon: whether electricity could be seen as a zero-carbon solution.
- Blue-sky thinking: clarity on the degree to which external experts had been given to input on the blue-sky thinking for initial options under consideration.
- Resident confidence: how individual metering might improve the confidence of residents as well as potentially reducing individual usage by 20%.
- Thermal battery option: whether any other network on the same scale as PDHU used thermal batteries as a heating solution and if transferring along a

river was replicable elsewhere. Members also asked about the risk of having one supplier with this method and whether back-up options would be needed.

- Cooling source: whether a potential new source could consider cooling as well as heating, for the warmer summer months.
- Further recommendations: Members suggested that the Council should consider appointing independent financial experts, in addition to the technical expert, so support and guide residents. Members also suggested that Ward Councillor involvement on developments should be improved.

6.2 Actions

1. To provide the Committee with an outline on proposals for charging of commercial units and charities which operate within the network.
2. To provide the figures referenced that justify why different energy tariffs on different estates is considered a disadvantage to the options 5 and options 6 presented in the report.
3. To provide the assumptions made in terms of estimated capital and energy costs in the forecasted cost analysis within the strategic outline case.

6.3 Recommendations

1. The Committee recommended that the Council consider changing the title of the programme, to give fair consideration to all options.
2. The Committee recommended that the Council consider vulnerability, particularly for elderly or those with additional needs, in any potential decanting from properties that might be necessary at some point due to renovation.
3. The Committee recommended that the Council considers affordability per unit/household and that costs of £50,000 per unit should automatically be discounted.
4. The Committee recommended that the Council considers options for cooling as well as heating when selecting the desired option.
5. The Committee recommended that the Council, in an addition to the technical expert provided, considers providing an independent financial expert to support and guide residents with costs.
6. The Committee recommended that the Council improves communication with ward councillors and keeps them abreast of developments and key engagement appointments.
7. The Committee recommended that the Council reviews the process of individual metering in flats to minimise disruption and, where possible, avoid the need to make multiple installations.

The Meeting ended at 20.59.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____