



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

## **WESTMINSTER SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at 7.00pm in Committee Rooms 6 & 7, 17<sup>th</sup> floor, City Hall, Victoria Street, London, SW1 6QP

**Present:** Councillors Ian Adams, Brian Connell, David Harvey, Andrew Havery and Barrie Taylor

**Also present:** Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of the Council

**Officers present:** Giles Roca (Head of Strategy), Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Manager) and Ellie Simpkin (Senior Committee & Governance Officer)

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP**

1.1 No apologies for absence were received. All Members were present.

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

2.1 No declarations of interest were made.

#### **3. MINUTES**

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2013 be agreed.

#### **4. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14**

4.1 The Commission considered its work programme for the current municipal year. Councillor Taylor suggested that the Commission received a paper on the frontline Councillor.

4.2 **RESOLVED:** That the work programme be agreed, subject to the addition of item on the frontline Councillor being added to the agenda for the next meeting.

## 5. THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

5.1 The Commission welcomed Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of the Council, to the meeting. The Leader gave an overview of the current key issues for the Council which included the following:

### 5.2 West End Partnership

5.2.1 Councillor Roe gave an update on the West End Partnership (WEP) and the role the Council would be playing alongside businesses to lobby Government on issues which were key for the West End economy. As Westminster's spend on lobbying was an adjunct to its other work, rather than lobbying and not getting much traction, it was thought that business-led lobbying would have more impact in a time in which creating growth was a priority. There were two areas which the WEP was currently concentrating on: fees and the ability for local authorities to offer speedier determination of medium sized applications for a higher fee and the ability for more specific use of the night time levy which was currently borough wide and not business specific. It was also noted that work was underway to review and unify the strategies currently employed by the various WEP partners to create joint priorities and a shared vision for the area. It was recognised that it was important that the Partnership achieved tangible outcomes. Consultants, funded by the business partners, had been tasked with developing the vision.

5.2.2 The Commission asked about the governance structure of the Partnership and noted that with the Leader of the Council as Chair, the Partnership agreed a way forward; it was a partnership not a decision making body. The various task groups ensured wider engagement with the issues and covered the areas of public realm, the night time economy, infrastructure post-crossrail, marketing and east of Oxford Street. There was also a cross-border group with the London Borough of Camden. The membership of the task groups included a West End ward Member and the relevant Cabinet Member. The Partnership also had an engagement programme and information would be presented to Councillors and resident groups at various stages.

5.2.3 Discussion was also had over the importance of reliable economic data. Councillor Roe explained that some high level data, such as the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), was available however, the lack of data was an issue which had become very apparent when the economic impact of the Olympics was being considered. The WEP would be identifying what missing data was needed and looking at the types of data used by various bodies. For example, the Greater London Authority (GLA) had a data store and officers were discussing the data types with the City of London with the aim to allow like-for-like comparison.

5.2.4 The Commission also highlighted the importance of ensuring that apparently small issues were picked up upon and linked to the wider strategic level. Councillor Roe agreed that it was important for the more granular issues to be raised and addressed and that these kinds of issues would be dealt with by the task groups who would be charged with finding solutions and bringing them back to the Partnership board. Discussion was also had over the importance of sector opportunities and identifying areas of strength (for

example the arts and antiques trade and the creative industries), the potential threats to these strengths and opportunities to help develop emerging sectors. It was noted that Councillor Roe would also be exploring joint working with the City as they recognised the West End as an asset.

### 5.3 Education & Employment

5.3.1 The Leader highlighted that all but one secondary school had been rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted with the other being rated as 'good'. Westminster had also come top nationally for improvement in reading and writing. The Council continued to work with the private sector to assist people into employment with 500 young people having been helped into sustainable employment. 95% of these people were still in employment after 6 months.

5.4 Members also received key performance indicators (KPIs) for quarter 2. Councillor Roe agreed with the Commission's view that it was important to understand what was happening 'on the ground' and that the current KPIs gave more of a strategic overview. Councillor Roe hoped that changes to the KPIs for the next financial year could be made to reflect this view. Councillor Roe highlighted the Council's achievements despite budget cuts and that although more financial reductions were expected, she believed that the Council was very well placed to deal with them. The following issues were discussed:

### 5.5 Cost of Agency Staff

5.5.1 The Commission asked about the cost of agency staff which was currently off track. Councillor Roe explained that a large amount of work had been done to bring down the number of agency staff. However, there was currently a large number of transformation projects taking place for which temporary staff had been employed. These were genuine temporary specialist positions. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Customer Services was aware of the situation and monitoring it closely.

### 5.6 Resident Satisfaction

5.6.1 The Commission highlighted that resident satisfaction with the way the Council handled their enquiry had been marked as off track having achieved 46%. Councillor Roe explained that the Council was trying to make it easier for residents to contact through improved IT and that the relet of the customer services contract may be having an impact on this figure.

5.7 Finally, the Commission asked about the induction of the new Chief Executive and noted that he had been visiting the Council on a weekly basis, meeting staff and Members. The Commission and the Leader recorded their thanks to Mike More, Chief Executive, who would be leaving the Council in the New Year and wished him well for the future.

## 6. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PUBLIC AFFAIRS & POSITIONING

- 6.1 The Commission considered a paper which explored opportunities for the policy & scrutiny function to engage and have influence beyond the immediate borough and tri-borough area.
- 6.2 Discussion was had over the success of health scrutiny in engaging with partners and how best practice in the area could be applied to reviewing other service providers. It was agreed that further consideration would be given as to how best to engage with the Parliamentary Select Committee and the GLA scrutiny process and that discussions would take place with individual Policy and Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Members on the consultations and opportunities which they would like to explore further. Members requested that the list of possible engagement opportunities be regularly updated and reviewed.
- 6.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and further discussions with Policy and Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Members on future consultations and possible engagement opportunities take place.

## 7. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY RESOURCE

- 7.1 The Commission received a paper which set out the spend against the policy & scrutiny function budget in 2012/13 and agreed to have an update on the budget position at each meeting.
- 7.2 **RESOLVED:** That 1) the report be noted and 2) further updates on the scrutiny resource budget position be given at future meetings.

## 8. END OF MEETING

- 8.1 The meeting ended at 8.15pm.

CHAIRMAN \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_