



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

## **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Wednesday 24th May, 2017**, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Brian Connell, Tony Devenish, Andrew Smith and Barrie Taylor

**Also Present:** Councillor Nickie Aiken (Leader of the City Council).

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Jonathan Glanz

#### **1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

- 1.1 Councillor Brian Connell was nominated to be the new Chairman of the Commission, and was duly appointed.

#### **2 MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Jonathan Glanz. As Councillor Glanz had been unable to attend, he had submitted extensive comments on the issues included in the agenda.

#### **3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 3.1 No declarations were received.

#### **4 MINUTES**

- 4.1 The Commission agreed the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2016 as a correct record.

##### **4.2 Matters Arising**

- 4.2.1 Members commended the model for scrutiny followed by the Commission, which included regular question and answer sessions with the Leader and Chief Executive. The need for all Members of the Commission to be consulted

on the content of the Annual Report, in addition to the Committee Chairmen was also highlighted.

## **5 THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

- 5.1 Councillor Nickie Aiken (Leader of the City Council) provided an update on current and forthcoming issues within her portfolio. Commission Members also received an update from Charlie Parker (Chief Executive) on matters of corporate interest.
- 5.2 The Leader commented on the recent terrorist attack in Manchester, and informed the Commission that she had written to the Mayor of Manchester and the Leader of the Council to offer condolences and support. She also congratulated them on the effectiveness of their response, which saw the emergency services, local authority and people of Manchester working together. The Lord Mayor of Westminster had similarly written to his counterpart in Manchester. The Local Government Chronical had contacted Councillor Aiken to determine what a local authority's response to terrorist attacks should be, particularly in view of the recent attack in Westminster. The Leader had considered that local authorities had an important part to play, particularly in the aftermath of an atrocity, in bringing the community together.
- 5.3 Changes to Shared Services
- 5.3.1 The Commission discussed the changes to Tri-borough working and disallocation of shared services, and acknowledged that the City Council was in a complex situation as the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham (LBHF) were yet to determine the model on how services would be reconfigured. At present, the changes only affected Adult Social Care, Public Health and Children's Services, and Westminster was working with the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC) to establish a bi-borough agreement. It was anticipated that the reconfiguration would be finalised in 12 months, with some changes being in place by the end of the year. The Leader highlighted the excellent services that were being provided and the savings that had been achieved, and considered Tri-borough working had been a success.
- 5.3.2 Services which currently remained within Tri-borough arrangements included legal services, libraries, and finance and treasury management. The Leader informed the Commission that LBHF may buy back a number of shared services, which could include fostering and adoption; together with services provided by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and Youth Offending Team (YOT). Discussions were also taking place with LBHF on how legal services could be better commercialised.
- 5.3.3 It was agreed that the Scrutiny Commission should provide an oversight of how the overall programme of activity was proceeding, and of the costs associated with the de-segregation. The individual services would continue to be monitored by Policy and Scrutiny Committees.

#### 5.4 West End Partnership (WEP)

- 5.4.1 The Commission discussed the WEP and Oxford Street Project, and highlighted the need for the Partnership to take into account the changes to the retail and commercial offer which were being caused by online-shopping, and by the change in the use of property from office to residential. It was recognised that the vast majority of people visited stores in Oxford Street and then bought online, and the Leader considered that the offer provided by the Oxford Street district needed to become more of a retail experience with restaurants and cafes. 4.4.2 Consultation on responsible growth and the height of buildings in the West End had recently ended, and it was acknowledged that adding a few further stories to existing buildings could deliver the additional space that was needed to meet the City Council's objectives for affordable housing. The Commission recognised the need to work with the property industry to construct taller buildings where appropriate, while also protecting Westminster's world heritage status and unique character. It was agreed that each neighbourhood needed to be considered on its individual merits, and that the issue of housing needed to be discussed with other boroughs as London-wide issue.
- 5.4.2 The Leader updated the Commission on progress in the bid to government for a Tax Increment Financing Initiative (TIF) for the West End, and noted that alternative plans were being developed should the funding not be received. Resources for the WEP had so far mostly been provided through the working partnership, with research being undertaken independently by partners and shared with the WEP.
- 5.4.3 The WEP had now been meeting for a number of years, and as the new Chairman, the Leader had asked other members of the Partnership to consider what the main objectives of the WEP should be in the future. A lot of work had been undertaken on infrastructure, and it was suggested that the next stage should include marketing other areas such as culture and tourism.

#### 4.5 Business Rates

- 4.5.1 The Commission noted that Westminster's rateable value had risen by 25% overall, compared to an average London rise of 22%. The City Council had lobbied the Government over the need for changes in business rates, which needed to reflect Westminster's unique position. Consideration was also being given to the introduction of super-prime supplements, which would be an addition to Council Tax for properties with a value above a certain value

#### 4.6 STP

- 4.6.1 The Commission discussed progress in the development of the North West London Sustainability Transformation Plan (STP). Westminster continued to be the lead borough for the finance work stream of the partnership, and had developed an investment model for how certain activity could be supported without Transformation funding, but by recycling money already in the system. The Commission noted that separate funding had been secured for mental health work, diabetes, and also for some specialist cancer support.

- 4.7 The Leader commented on the perception by other parts of the country that London received too much financial support, and informed the Commission that she had begun a 'Your London' campaign, which sought to build a narrative which highlighted the benefits of a strong London economy to the rest of the country. 4.8 Other issues discussed included the Managed Services Programme, and progress in London devolution and in the decant and refresh of Westminster City Hall.

## **5 OPTIONS FOR SCRUTINISING THE WEST END PARTNERSHIP**

- 5.1 In response to a request made at the last meeting of the Commission, Muge Dindjer (Policy & Scrutiny Manager) presented examples of comparative partnership scrutiny of public investment, to determine which model for scrutiny would be most appropriate and effective for the West End Partnership (WEP). The request had been made in the context of the bid to government for a Tax Increment Financing Initiative (TIF) for the West End.
- 5.2 The Commission noted the advantages and disadvantages of the different models, and considered how these could be applied to the WEP should it become responsible for overseeing the delivery of significant amounts of public funding. 5.3 The Commission considered three options:
- 1 To continue to receive regular updates from the Leader for the time being, until the WEP received more significant funding and was much more in delivery mode.
  - 2 To scrutinise the WEP on an ad hoc exception basis at key times in the project timetable, if it became responsible for substantial additional sums of public money.
  - 3 To act as a core for the purposes of looking at the WEP in more detail on an annual basis. This approach could be more suitable at a later stage when there was more public funding, and programmes were being delivered.
- 5.3 It was noted that the WEP currently controlled low levels of public money, and that governance arrangements for the City Council and TfL already included an element of scrutiny. It was agreed that the level of scrutiny of the WEP needed to be proportionate, and be linked with the level of public money that was being spent. It was also recognised that Scrutiny had an important role with regard to transparency of WEP activities.
- 5.4 The Commission recognised the need for any scrutiny of the WEP to add value and coherence, and to avoid the duplication of any work already undertaken by partners. It was noted that the GLA Transport Committee on pedestrianising Oxford Street had published recommendations in September 2016 to which the Mayor had responded. The Commission agreed that any scrutiny of the WEP should avoid duplicating work, but could provide coherence for any gaps that there may be.

- 5.5 Although no significant public funds had yet been received, the Chief Executive highlighted the potential benefits of a separate review by the City Council of the TIF bid process, and what it had achieved.
- 5.6 Members considered the options for scrutiny that had been suggested, and agreed that until the WEP took on responsibility for the co-ordination of substantial additional sums of public money, or there was a significant delivery of projects or the nature of the work of the partnership change, the Commission should continue to receive regular updates from the Leader and Chief Executive.

## **6 DEVELOPING THE ROLE OF SCRUTINY**

- 6.1 Muge Dindjer (Policy & Scrutiny Manager) presented a report that considered options for developing the role of scrutiny and enhancing the role of Ward Members. The report also considered the role of scrutiny in supporting the delivery of the new 'City for All' strategy; and suggested ways for greater openness, transparency and engagement for Members, staff and residents.
- 6.2 The Commission acknowledged that scrutiny was most effective when it contributed to policy development; and worked alongside the Executive to support the delivery of the City Council's policy goals. The Leader of the City Council and Chief Executive suggested that scrutiny could be more ambitious, and highlighted the need to seek the greater involvement of Westminster's residents and partners and take the scrutiny process into the community.
- 6.3 The Commission commented on the success of the 'Meet the Leader' sessions, and discussed the value of exit interviews where staff could flag up issues of corporate concern. Members also discussed the routes through which residents could add issues to Scrutiny Work Programmes; together with the difficulty in engaging with hard to reach communities.
- 6.4 The Commission discussed the options that had been set out in the report, and agreed to recommend that:
1. Draft scrutiny work programmes should be shared with all Ward Members to enable them to contribute their concerns and ideas as part of the annual development of the work programmes.
  2. The role of Ward Members be developed as part of scrutiny, which could include formalising their contribution to Committees as expert witnesses with special knowledge of their local areas and issues
  3. More prominence be given to Work Programmes on the website, and to contributions being invited from the public regarding items/services which scrutiny should consider to contribute to the annual work programme i.e. from January – April each year.
  4. Scrutiny and Cabinet Members should jointly agree a number of themes/areas where Task Groups should carry out policy development work

5. The City Council should establish a system whereby staff (perhaps anonymously) and any Member could suggest items for scrutiny at any stage in the year.
6. More scrutiny meetings be held outside of City Hall to make them more accessible to the public and advertise them.

## **7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES**

- 7.1 Muge Dindjer (Policy & Scrutiny Manager) presented the draft Work Programme for each of Westminster's Policy & Scrutiny Committees. The Commission noted that the Work Programmes were at different levels of approval, and were still to be finalised.
- 7.2 Members discussed the future Work Programme for the Commission, which would continue to include regular updates on the West End Partnership; together with the changes to Tri-borough shared services; Devolution; and the Transformation of Public Services. Commission Members also commented on the need to measure the time and resources that were being spent on scrutiny, together with the quality of outputs.
- 7.3 The Commission discussed the date of its next meeting, and agreed that the meeting currently set for 29 June would be rescheduled for 27 September 2017, with an earlier start time of 6.30, when the Leader and Chief Executive would both be available.

The Meeting ended at 8.57pm.

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_

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