



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Wednesday 25 November 2020 at 6.30pm**, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Karen Scarborough (Chairman), Iain Bott, Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Tony Devenish, Adam Hug and Gotz Mohrindra.

Also Present: Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Raj Mistry (Executive Director of Environment and City Management, Mark Chalmers (Operational CONTEST Manager), Lizzie Barratt (Policy and Scrutiny Officer), Artemis Kassi (Senior Committee and Governance Officer and Sarah Craddock (Senior Committee and Governance Officer).

1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to the membership.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 1 October 2020 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

4.1 The Commission received a written update from Stuart Love (Chief Executive) who responded to questions on matters of corporate interest, which included:

- Westminster Connects being re-invigorated with additional resources to reach out and offer support to vulnerable people during the second lockdown and in preparation for winter.
- working with the NHS to roll out the vaccine from the beginning of December with a view to first vaccinating care home residents and workers as well as residents aged 80+.

- the importance of identifying and communicating with hard-to-reach/vulnerable communities who are immune adverse and to promote the public health messages regarding COVID-19.
 - the work of the Economy Team along with Public Health in supporting people back to work.
 - the utilisation of the new Lateral Flow Testing Devices which allowed results to be ready in approximately 20 minutes and could be used in and to support the hospitality industry.
 - the continued support for businesses through the Council's Movement Strategy, the distribution of government grants totalling £98 million and the request for the Government's Discretionary Grant Scheme to further benefit central London.
 - the importance of supporting rough sleepers into appropriate pathways to meet their needs and the work being carried out with faith groups and Pan London.
 - the importance of reaching vulnerable people unknown to charitable organisations or the Council to ensure that they receive help obtaining food and are not digitally excluded.
- 4.2 Other issues considered were Westminster taking the lead on the Mortality Management Group for Wave 2 of COVID-19, the preparations for exit from the European Union and the opportunities for the Council to make positive changes in response to the climate emergency and green economy (smart cities).
- 4.3 The Commission discussed that the two biggest challenges for the Council were needing to make substantial savings over the next three years and getting Westminster's economy up and running again. The Committee noted that London had not seen the same return to work as other areas of the country due to the public's reliance on public transport and the perception that it was not COVID-19 secure.
- 4.4 The Commission further discussed that social distancing and testing for COVID-19 would continue alongside the roll out of the vaccine for at least another twelve months and the priority list to receive the vaccine would be dictated by Public Health. The Commission however noted that the pandemic had significantly strengthened the Council's working relationship with the NHS. The Chief Executive confirmed that London would continue to move as one into the new national Tier system.
- 4.5 The Commission congratulated the Executive Leadership Team on the results of the 2020 staff survey that placed Westminster Council comfortably in the top quartile of public sector organisations.

4.6 **ACTIONS:**

1. That the results of the staff survey be circulated to the Commission.
2. That the Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital be advised about the lack of digital access in temporary accommodation.

5 **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS UPDATE**

5.1 The Commission received a report that provided an update on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and key areas of ongoing work. The Commission heard how the pandemic had tested the Council's emergency preparedness and how partnership working with other organisations such as public health and the voluntary sector had been vital in the effective response to the pandemic and providing support for vulnerable people and communities.

5.2 The Commission discussed that as an emergency the COVID-19 pandemic had presented an unusual challenge and had shown that resilience across the organisation was mixed. The Committee noted that resilience needed to be embedded in all service delivery with processes and structures in place that were not reliant on individuals but could be delivered by a range of staff.

5.3 The key themes that emerged from the Commission's discussion were:

- the importance of maintaining resilience in all Council's services, particularly around Public Health and Adult and Children Services.
- the importance of receiving accurate and meaningful data on a regular basis to ensure the correct decisions were being made at any given time.
- the Council's ability to prepare and respond to further waves of COVID-19, other winter pressures and unplanned events.
- the disruption to much of the Emergency Planning Team's core business as a result of staff absences and changed demand.
- the preparedness of the Council in case of a terrorist attack in the coming weeks/over Christmas, highway safety and access for emergency vehicles.
- the implications of the next budget setting cycle on the ability and resilience of Westminster services to maintain service delivery and have the capacity to react to future challenges and emergencies.
- the continuation of the work of the Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) sub-groups that had enabled effective joint working and had been positive and useful to date.
- the nature and extent of protests in Westminster and close working with the police.
- the preparedness regarding a potential risk of a cyber-attack on the Council.

- the importance that the Council be sufficiently prepared for all different types of situations in the foreseeable future and that work needed around short to medium term horizon scanning and risk identification be carried out at pace.

5.4 The Commission noted that work at a pan-London level had developed the Resilience Standards for London Self-Assessment which had been launched in 2019. The Self-Assessment included 11 standards that were designed to both provide assurances and drive continuous improvement across the full range of this work: from senior leadership and organisational culture to emergency response to recovery and building community resilience.

5.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Commission commended the Council on its work responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged a continued commitment to learning and embedding resilience across all its services.

6 WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

6.1 ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKERS

6.1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Action and Recommendation Trackers be noted.

6.2 COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

6.2.1 The Commission discussed possible topics to review and add to their work programme and the importance of inviting external experts to future meetings

6.2.2 RESOLVED:

1. That the following topics of Food Poverty, Modern Day Slavery, Digital Exclusion and Cyber Security be added to the work programme.
2. That officers re-publicise the scrutiny meetings amongst the scrutiny members.

7. TERMINATION OF MEETING

7.1 The meeting ended at 8.06pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____