



City of Westminster

Committee Agenda

Title: **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

Meeting Date: **Thursday 4th February, 2021**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Venue: **This will be a virtual meeting.**

Members: **Councillors:**

Karen Scarborough (Chairman)
Iain Bott
Nafsika Butler-Thalassis
Adam Hug
Gotz Mohindra
Andrew Smith

This will be a virtual meeting and members of the public and press are welcome to follow the meeting and listen to discussion to Part 1 of the Agenda.

This meeting will be live streamed and recorded. To access the recording after the meeting please revisit the link.

If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Officer, Artemis Kassi (akassi@westminster.gov.uk).

Corporate Website: www.westminster.gov.uk



Note for Members: Members are reminded that Officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and Members are welcome to raise questions in advance of the meeting. With regard to item 2, guidance on declarations of interests is included in the Code of Governance; if Members and Officers have any particular questions they should contact the Head of Legal & Democratic Services in advance of the meeting please.

AGENDA

PART 1 (IN PUBLIC)

1. MEMBERSHIP

To note that Councillor Andrew Smith has replaced Councillor Tony Devenish.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations by Members and Officers of the existence and nature of any pecuniary interests or any other significant interest in matters on this agenda.

3. MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2020.

4. LEADER'S UPDATE

To receive an update on current and forthcoming issues from Councillor Rachael Robathan (Leader of the Council).

5. WORK PROGRAMME

To discuss the work programme for 2021.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To consider any other business which the Chairman considers urgent.

Stuart Love
Chief Executive
29 January 2021



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**, via TEAMS.

Members Present: Councillors Karen Scarborough (Chairman), Iain Bott, Nafsika Butler-Thalassiss, 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 _____



City of Westminster **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

Date:	4 February 2021
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Leader's Update
Report of:	Cllr Rachael Robathan
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Leader of the Council
Policy Context:	COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Executive Summary

This report provides Westminster's Scrutiny Commission with an update on the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Council's Response.

Key Areas for Commission's Consideration

1.1. The Commission is asked to note the report.

2. COVID-19 and the Council's Response

Testing Centres

2.1. As of 22nd January we have a testing capacity of 3,000 tests per day – these are for fast response lateral flow tests (LFTs), and currently resident take up is averaging 500-750 tests daily for all three sites. Currently we also averaging 150-300 PCR tests per day in those sites. The PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests are prioritised for people who are.

2.2. During this wave, local testing capacity for those with symptoms (using polymerase chain reaction or PCR tests) has been at three local testing sites (Greenside Community Hall – Marylebone/Church Street, Grosvenor Hall – Pimlico, and Lydford Hall - Harrow Road/Queen's Park). The centres are all operating a 7 day a week service from 08:00 – 20:00. A mobile testing site at Hyde Park is also operating twice a week. Testing capacity per site varies from 144 to 216 tests per day and capacity is meeting demand.

2.3. After a successful pilot at Harris Academy, three symptom free test sites are operational (Moberly Sports Centre, Little Venice Sports Centre and Westminster Cathedral) operating 7 days a week from 10:00 to 16:00.

2.4. Westminster's case rate, at 442 per 100,000 (7 days up to 16th January), is the fifth lowest by Local Authority in London, and currently falling. London's average for the 7 days (to 16th January is 679).

2.5. Latest data shows testing rates (i.e., those being tested) in Westminster are lower than the London average as would be expected with lower community infection rates. There continues to be spare availability at testing sites each day and communications remain key to ensuring those with symptoms and those asymptomatic, key workers and others who must be out to work, are tested.

2.6. Asymptomatic testing in schools will be overseen by the Department for Education when schools re-open following lockdown, with the Local Authority in support and testing within pilot sites in the interim.

2.7. The Council established an enhanced local contact tracing scheme in November 2020 to supplement that of the NHS national test and trace programme.

Vaccinations

2.8. The roll out of Covid-19 vaccinations commenced in late December. The vaccination programme is being organised by colleagues in the NHS with support from the Local Authority including Public Health, communications, community engagement and logistics.

2.9. Westminster has two primary care sites as part of the first wave of vaccinations for high priority groups. Care Home staff and residents are being offered vaccinations and forecast to be completed by the end of January. Frontline staff including social care workers will be offered vaccines from 1st February.

- 2.10. Due to the availability and prioritisation supporting the rollout of the ` vaccination, communications are being managed at North West London level.
- 2.11. Local work to engage with communities, to promote the benefits of the vaccine and to monitor and address any inequalities in uptake is underway. This includes regular engagement with faith groups, other community groups, and local MPs to ensure that recent reports of anti-vaccination activity in some communities does not have an impact on vaccine uptake.

Westminster Connects

- 2.12. The focus since November has been providing support for residents through a hardship fund, shielding calls and volunteers. Westminster Connects continues to work closely with VCS organisations to address food need (foodbanks and community food initiative); wellbeing calls and mentoring for young people.
- 2.13. Regular support is offered and provided to the shielding and vulnerable residents through a helpline, monthly automated calls to the shielding and vulnerable older housing tenants, support and referrals for food, shopping and wellbeing, and connections with volunteers for practical support. Westminster Connects is also facilitating the local track and trace service, to contact residents who have tested positive but who the national service has been unable to trace.
- 2.14. Both services will remain in place until the end of March 2021 and will be regularly reviewed in light of changing community need. Both services are staffed by a redeployed team from across the council.

Rough Sleeping

- 2.15. The council was successful in bidding for £1.73m for the winter plan (Oct-March) to keep people safe. This funding covers; an Assessment & Triage service to rapidly move people off the streets and into more appropriate accommodation in their home area; a staging post which is specifically for individuals on the streets who have a housing solution identified but are on a waiting list; and up to 125 placements into the private rented sector with dedicated support workers to support them through their journey to independence.

- 2.16. The Protect Programme launched in November and received funding of £996,000 from MHCLG. It supports the ongoing efforts of our work to provide accommodation for rough sleepers during the pandemic and will help areas that need additional support most during the restrictions and throughout winter and to protect some of the most vulnerable rough sleepers in our communities from COVID-19.
- 2.17. Outreach services are working with hard to house individuals, with provision in the Protect Programme who have historically been more challenging to engage or have not maintained accommodation.

Economy and Business

- 2.18. The Business Unit continues to provide up to date information to businesses on the support available and legal requirements as they unfold at each stage of the pandemic. Since 18 March 2020, the Business Unit has handled circa 4,757 individual business enquiries.
- 2.19. The Business Unit supports the Business Rates Team with the administration of the grant schemes and assist with the identification of eligible businesses. To date, the Business Rates Team has received 4,173 applications for the mandatory November Lockdown grants and paid 2,886.
- 2.20. The Business & Enterprise Service launched the first round of applications for the Additional Restrictions Grant on 14 January 2021. Up to 2,600 businesses will be eligible to apply for a £2,000 grant under the current criteria.

Movement Strategy

- 2.21. The extended pavements to support people to move in a socially distanced manner, implemented using barriers were mostly removed in September. The exceptions were Oxford Street, Regent Street and Piccadilly. 14 temporary cycle lanes were introduced which were demarcated with painted lines and signs. The temporary cycle lanes are currently all under review.
- 2.22. Support was provided to clusters of hospitality businesses through the provision of outside space for dining, using Mass barriers or street closures. Following London moving into Tier 3 and subsequently lockdown, hospitality businesses are currently not open for dining.
- 2.23. The barriers to support outdoor dining have remained in place and could operate again when the current lockdown is lifted. A conversation on sustained hospitality has started to look at what solutions should/could be provided for businesses going forwards with a view of returning to a tier system.