



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Thursday 6th October, 2022**, Hybrid, MS Teams and Rooms 18.01-03, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Patricia McAllister (Chair), Melvyn Caplan, Iman Less, Angela Piddock, Rachael Robathan, Karen Scarborough and Jason Williams.

Also Present: Mark Chalmers (Prepare and Prevent Operational CONTEST Manager), Neale Coleman (Chair of the Future of Westminster Commission), Councillor Adam Hug (Leader of the Council), Stuart Love (Chief Executive), and Clare O'Keefe (Temporary Joint Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 Councillor Patricia McAllister welcomed Councillor Melvyn Caplan and Councillor Iman Less to the Committee.
- 1.2 The Committee noted that Councillor Iman Less was attending as substitute for Councillor Paul Fisher.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting on 20 July 2022.

3.2 RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2022 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

4 POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATES

- 4.1 The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Children and Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector (CAPHVS) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Piddock. The Commission was updated on the following:

- The most recent meeting of the CAPHVS Committee concentrated on the Cabinet Member for Young People, Learning and Leisure's portfolio and discussed the Annual Youth Justice Plan and Out of School Provision.
 - The Members of the CAPHVS Committee acknowledged the breadth of the Cabinet Member Update and discussed homing in on particular aspects to facilitate deeper, rather than broader, discussions.
 - The meeting of the next CAPHVS Committee will focus on health and the Gordon Hospital.
 - The CAPHVS Committee aims to have a work programme which is flexible and responsive to current issues.
 - In light of the CAPHVS Committee identifying the International Baccalaureate as a topic of interest, the Chair has proposed to visit a local school and hold a meeting there.
 - There will be an Individual Member Study on LGBTQ+ Public Health by Councillor Williams (Chair of the Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee) and this report will come to the CAPHVS Committee to be scrutinised.
 - The Committee will also be looking at how schools are going to cope with a short supply of funding.
- 4.2 The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Communities, City Management and Air Quality (CCMAQ) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Williams. The Commission was updated on the following:
- The most recent meeting of the CCMAQ Committee heard Cabinet Member Updates from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection, and the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality.
 - The recent meeting also received reports on Gas Street Lighting Electrification and Environmental Enforcement.
 - The next CCMAQ Committee meeting will be focusing on the impact of local police.
- 4.3 The Commission received a verbal update from the Chair of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration (CAHR) Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor McAllister. The Commission was updated on the following:
- The meeting of the CAHR Committee scheduled on 19 September 2022 was postponed until 14 November 2022 due to the state funeral of HRH Queen Elizabeth II.
 - The postponed CAHR Committee will have a substantive item on major works.
 - The CAHR Committee on 18 October will have a focus on housing repairs.
 - The CAHR Committee has many issues that its Members would like to see on the agenda in the coming months and years, including: allocations systems and empty and void properties.
 - The Members of the CAHR Committee were noted to be committed, keen and enthusiastic.

4.4 The Commission received a verbal update from Councillor Less on behalf of Councillor Fisher for the Finance, Planning and Economic Development (FPED) Policy and Scrutiny Committee. The Commission was updated on the following:

- The FPED Committee will be considering, and scrutinising key decisions made regarding the Oxford Street District Programme within the next few months when a meaningful paper can be provided.
- The next meeting of the FPED Committee will focus on the Smart Cities Programme.

5 LEADER'S REPORT

5.1 The Committee received a written update from the Leader of the Council on forthcoming and current issues. The Leader verbally thanked Council officers for their efforts in the lead up to and during the state funeral of HRH Queen Elizabeth II. The Leader responded to questions on the following topics:

- The importance of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill 2022 to aid the work the Council undertakes operationally on business enforcement, especially if Companies House is reformed and owners of businesses are more easily identified. These reforms will strengthen the local economy.
- The scale of the operation, professionalism of officers and contractors, and limited disruption to businesses was commended. Officers will provide any feedback and learning opportunities to be taken into consideration for future major events in Westminster.
- Continuing to make the case at local and Government levels to Transport for London regarding the proposed bus cuts. Whilst the Council is not yet sure on the extent of any changes, clarity will be obtained in the near future.
- Developing relationships with the Government regarding the Westminster Against Dirty Money campaign and helping the Government by drawing attention to issues and sharing practical information with relevant agencies.
- The value of involving residents in Notting Hill Carnival arrangements, especially those made by the Housing and Events teams in regard to barriers. Where the series of post-Carnival engagement events were delayed by Operation London Bridge, the commitment to hold the meetings with various key stakeholders should be made a priority to ensure Council services are effective. As this was the first Carnival since the COVID-19 pandemic started, residents should have been engaged at an earlier stage.
- The importance of decisions under officer delegation going through the proper process. Whilst Members can comment on Cabinet Member decisions, there are a number of recent decisions which have rested with officer's delegated authority. Members can ask Cabinet Members for more information on those that sit under their portfolios if they wish.
- The importance of Cabinet meetings being scheduled to operate regularly after Operation London Bridge.
- The answering of questions in a prompt manner. There were questions raised at the last two meetings of the full Council as well as general enquiries to Council departments which have not been answered. Whilst the timeframe for

answers varies between colleagues, questions should be answered efficiently. Departments like the Housing Service and Public Protection and Licensing are often inundated with queries so Members are encouraged to raise specific examples as it will help the departments better manage enquiries.

- The value of having ward reports from local City Inspectors. This recently changed to an overall city-wide report which has the potential to be less useful, especially for those wards whose boundaries have changed or merged with other wards.
- How the £189,000 extended to the Citizens Advice Bureau will be spent by the service beyond increasing staff capacity to manage incoming queries.
- The cost of Operation London Bridge to the Council, including officer time, contractors and costs covered and reimbursed by Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Veolia did an outstanding job at keeping Westminster clean.
- The importance of transparency of decision-making when adopting or rejecting the Future of Westminster Commission recommendations. As the Future of Westminster Commission is advisory, looking at a range of topics within different timeframes and subject to different resources, there has been regular information and advice fed back by the Future of Westminster Commission and the process of choosing recommendations will be transparent.
- The independent review of the COVID-19 response focusing on health and, in particular, the NHS vaccination rates and reliability of GP lists. Discussions are ongoing with officers regarding the shape and scope of this and how the Council interacted with other services and the Commission will be informed of this in due course.
- The review of policy concerning homeless households in the Fairer Westminster strategy. The Council would like to prevent residents who have a long-term connection to Westminster being moved out of borough and not having the opportunity to move back. The policy seeks to ensure that temporary accommodation standards are robust and the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee will be updated about the next steps in due course.
- The importance of continuity within the scrutiny function, especially when relating to Member attendance.

5.2 **ACTIONS:**

1. Questions from the Full Council meetings in June and September will be answered.
2. The Cabinet Members for City Management and Air Quality and Public Protection and Licensing will be advised of the potential negative effect a city-wide report from City Inspectors will have on ward Councillors.
3. Granular detail will be provided to Members on how the £189,000 extended to the Citizens Advice Bureau will be spent by the service.
4. Members will be updated on the timeframe, shape and scope of the independent review of the Council's COVID-19 response and its Chair.
5. The review of policy concerning homeless households in the Fairer Westminster strategy will go to the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee in due course.

6 FUTURE OF WESTMINSTER COMMISSION - UPDATE REPORT

6.1 The Committee received an overview of the Future of Westminster Commission from the Commission Chair, Neale Coleman. Neale Coleman responded to questions on the following topics:

- Meetings of the Future of Westminster Commission will be public facing by advertising not only by inviting audiences through the networks of the local centres hosting the meetings, but more widely.
- The Future of Westminster Commission has a broad scope and, whilst certain locations within the City of Westminster have been identified as priorities, the Commission should be looking at the City as a whole and ensuring all areas are being taken into account. The Commission is keen to integrate the work it undertakes and, in particular, regarding the 'place' stream of work which is looking at one area of the City and will have real benefit and provide lessons for other parts of the City. Furthermore, the drive to bring people together to work more effectively both in the public and private sector will ensure more is being done for people across the City.
- There are concerns about homeless applicants being placed out of borough. There is a need for greater ongoing support, information and advice for these households.
- Commission Members engaging with a range of officers across the Council.
- The Tenants Panel formed by collaboration between the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, the Chair of the Housing strand and officers responsible for resident engagement to identify people to join the Tenants Panel. The panel will help inform the housing review.
- The importance of education impacting all four strands of the Commission; the Fairer Representation strand broadly focuses on young people and the role of schools where more needs to be done to get young people's views.
- The need to reduce emissions from buildings in the City, which currently constitutes 86 percent of total emissions. A number of the big landowners and property interests in the City are being brought together, including the Head of Sustainability for the Crown Estate and Director of Sustainability and Innovation from the Grosvenor Estate, to discuss a range of initiatives.
- The importance of scrutinising any recommendations of the Future of Westminster Commission which are adopted by the Council.

6.2 ACTIONS:

1. More details of the Tenants Panel, its formation and split between tenants and leaseholders, will be provided to Members by the Cabinet Member for Housing Services when it has been formed.

7 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING REPORT

7.1 The Committee received an update from Mark Chalmers (Prepare and Prevent Operational CONTEST Manager) on the Council's Emergency Preparedness Planning. Mark Chalmers responded to questions on the following topics:

- The identification of vulnerable people who are not known to the Council and various agencies. It is a complex area, and the Council has joined up with other services and established systems to reach out to partners. The Council has a database of vulnerable people and there are Adult Social Care officers who knock on doors to check on residents. There is a lot of work ongoing regarding community resilience.
- The importance of helping residents affected by flash flooding through having a multi-agency plan was noted. In the immediate term, encouraging self-support and urging residents to stay with friends and family, or helping residents to find suitable alternative accommodation. In terms of ongoing support, Adult Social Care officers are trained to help those suffering from trauma.
- The possibility of Councillors receiving emergency training, for both during crises and after. There have been sessions held for Councillors which outlined what to expect from the Council, the role of Councillors in terms of preparedness and business continuity plans. Councillors have a role to encourage communities to build resilience and help support residents through recovery. Another training session will be scheduled.
- The relevance of the Commission receiving a twice-yearly report on the Council's Emergency Preparedness Planning was agreed considering the ever-changing environment of the 21st Century.
- The importance of emergency preparedness being both communicated to and actioned by Council staff. The COVID-19 pandemic raised an awareness across the Council and affected each service area, especially concerning business continuity. The intention is that this is built on and maintained with each service having their own business continuity champions to increase diversity in responses to challenges.
- The need to be proactive to prevent flooding, especially in relation to maintaining gullies in areas where flooding is a known issue. The rain in August this year on consecutive Wednesdays was exacerbated by early leaf fall and events like this are likely to worsen with the effects of climate change. The pan-London Flooding Group, hosted by the GLA, is attended by the Chief Executive in respect of the Council's London-wide resilience responsibilities and considering that Westminster was so badly affected by flooding in July 2021. There were proactive steps taken prior to rainfall in August as the Council were warned by the Met in advance about the heavy rainfall; more detail can be given on the steps that were taken and where.
- The usefulness of having different reports regarding protests, including where there are multiple planned on a particular day or time period. A risk-informed approach is taken where a watching brief on what is happening is produced.
- The importance of a prompt communication response in crises, especially during that of flooding. The communications response during the July 2021 floods was acknowledged as not being robust enough and this is being looked into in the Council's emergency preparedness review.
- Raising with housing associations the disappointment felt regarding their response to residents during the floods where the Council needed to step in to ensure adequate care was provided. Housing associations should have a fit-for-purpose emergency preparedness plan and take up financial aid offered to them. Whilst the issue of housing provider response will not be investigated as part of the Council's emergency preparedness review, it is part of a wider

piece of work and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development is also investigating home insurance for flood victims.

- The role of the fire brigade in evacuating immobile residents to places of safety and the Council's responsibility for humanitarian care.

7.2 **ACTIONS:**

1. Arrange another training session for Councillors will be held on emergency planning, to be delivered in-person and with interactive exercises.
2. Information regarding the steps that were taken, and where, regarding the preventative gulley clearing work in August will be shared.
3. Emergency Preparedness Planning will be scheduled again on the work programme in six months' time.

8 **WORK PROGRAMME**

8.1 The Westminster Scrutiny Commission reviewed the work programme and discussed the following:

- A report on the impact of COVID-19 on Council finances could be submitted as a written report to Members in January.
- The subject of participatory budget setting will be investigated as an item to bring to January's meeting.
- January's meeting will be moved from 12 January to 26 January as this will allow Members to receive the most up-to-date reports from officers, considering that a high percentage of officers take annual leave up to and over the festive period.
- The scheduled Future of Westminster Commission update in January should be postponed to the meeting in March which will enable the Leader of the Council and relevant Cabinet Members to be scrutinised on the decisions made from the Commission's recommendations.
- The Climate Emergency Implementation Annual Report should be included on the work programme when suitable.
- The Terms of Reference for the Commission should be updated in the Council's Constitution.

9 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

9.1 The Commission stated that the reports which are presented at meetings should be taken as read.

9.2 The Commission discussed alternating reports between the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

The meeting ended at 21:02.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____

