



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## General Purposes Committee

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held on **Thursday 14th September, 2023**, Room 18.06 - 18h Floor, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6 QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors David Boothroyd (Chair), Aicha Less, Ellie Ormsby and Mark Shearer

#### 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 meeting held on 21 June 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

#### 4 APPROVAL OF COMPENSATION PAYMENT FOLLOWING A LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (LGSCO) INVESTIGATION

4.1 The Committee was presented with a report providing details of a complaint submitted by a service user through the Council's complaints process and to the Social Care Ombudsman. Following this complaint, an apology was offered and subsequently a compensation payment of £500. Following the submission of further information, the Ombudsman required a compensation payment of £2,000 to be paid to the service user.

4.2 The Committee noted the contents of the report and discussed its details. It was hoped that lessons had been learnt from the case and the Committee was pleased to note that a working group has been assembled to address

learning from the case and implement improvements to processes regarding referral and assessment pathways as well as special order and minor adaptations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the payment of compensation of £2,000 be approved and noted in order to comply with the Social Care Ombudsman's order.

**5 APPROVAL OF COMPENSATION PAYMENT FOLLOWING A HOUSING OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION (1)**

- 5.1 The Committee was presented with a report providing details of a complaint submitted by a tenant through the Council's complaints process and to the Housing Ombudsman. Following this complaint, a compensation payment of £5,033 was required to be paid to the tenant from the Housing Revenue Account.
- 5.2 The Committee noted the contents of the report and discussed its details. It was hoped that lessons had been learnt from the case and the Committee noted that a full Senior Management Team review had been carried out, with their findings and actions shared with the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Regulator to satisfy their compliance.

**RESOLVED:**

That the payment of compensation of £5,033 be approved to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's order.

**6 APPROVAL OF COMPENSATION PAYMENT FOLLOWING A HOUSING OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION (2)**

- 6.1 The Committee was presented with a report providing details of a complaint submitted by a tenant through the Council's complaints process and to the Housing Ombudsman. Following this complaint, a compensation payment of £2,100 was required to be paid to the tenant from the Housing Revenue Account.
- 6.2 The Committee noted the contents of the report and discussed its details. It was hoped that lessons had been learnt from the case and the Committee was pleased to note that major works contractors had been reminded of the Council's expectations with regards to treating residents with dignity and respect and of the Council's expectations with regards to vulnerable residents. The need to arrange visits to homes by pre-booked appointments and not unannounced visits had also been reiterated. A review was also being undertaken which would include an assessment of record keeping of communications with residents and contractors.

## **RESOLVED:**

That the payment of compensation of £2,100 be approved to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's order.

## **7 APPROVAL OF COMPENSATION PAYMENT FOLLOWING A HOUSING OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION (3)**

- 7.1 The Committee was presented with a report providing details of a complaint submitted by a tenant through the Council's complaints process and to the Housing Ombudsman. Following this complaint, a compensation payment of £3,430 was required to be paid to the tenant from the Housing Revenue Account.
- 7.2 The Committee noted the contents of the report and discussed its details. It was hoped that lessons had been learnt from the case and the Committee was pleased to note that a review had been undertaken with regard to training and guidance to staff about assessing properties prior to ending decants, with the aim of ensuring the failings identified in the report were not repeated. The processes for monitoring repair work completed by repairs contractors was to an appropriate standard would also be reviewed. In addition, processes for recording repairs would also be assessed and this would include attendance times and ongoing progress of work with the aim of ensuring the failings identified in the report were not repeated.

## **RESOLVED:**

That the payment of compensation of £3,430 be approved to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's order.

## **8 COUNCILLORS PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY**

- 8.1 The Committee received a report presenting a revised parental leave policy for Councillors. It was noted that a review had been undertaken as the policy had not been appraised since the adoption of the original policy in September 2019, but was also in response to the 'Fairer Westminster' motion passed by Full Council on 28 June 2023. This motion committed the Council to "Review the Council's parental leave policy, setting out members' entitlement to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances to ensure it as inclusive and fair as possible".
- 8.2 Members considered the proposed amendments to the policy and noted how they represented greater alignment with practice across London as well as clarifying and simplifying the process by which parental leave may be requested and handled.
- 8.3 The Committee was pleased to note that the amendments included:

- Clarifying that members were entitled to 12 months leave, subject to the 'six month rule';
- An extension to the length of time for the payment of any Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA);
- Revision of the shared parental leave policy so that any Councillors who have partners, who were not Council Members, but were taking parental leave, were entitled to share that leave and be reimbursed appropriately; and
- The inclusion of clearer processes on how Councillors apply for parental leave and expectations on what arrangements should be put in place when Councillors were taking this leave.

8.4 The Committee agreed that the proposed revisions to the Policy underscored the Council's commitment to creating a supportive work environment that recognised the diverse needs of members. It also reflected the Council's commitment to inclusivity and gender equality, enhancing diverse representation. Members were of the opinion that by offering enhanced parental leave, the Council would ensure members' well-being, foster a positive environment and promote sustainable, dedicated public service. Of particular importance was that the revised policy would strengthen the council's effectiveness, responsiveness, and connection with the community it served.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That Full council be recommended to approve the revised Parental Leave Policy for Councillors, attached at Appendix A of the report, and it be adopted into the Council's Constitution as part of an Appendix to the Member's Allowances Scheme.

## **9 POLICY AND SCRUTINY REVIEW**

9.1 The Committee considered the independent review that had taken place into policy and scrutiny at Westminster by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny ("CfGS"). It was recognised that it had been instigated to ensure the function met the high expectations of the Council, local communities, and partners by providing the most effective and impactful scrutiny function possible. It was noted how the Scrutiny Commission agreed to establish a Task Group to work through each recommendation and following consensus the preferred option was now before the Committee.

9.2 Members were interested to learn how it had been recommended that the Policy and Scrutiny Committees be restructured and constituted based on strategic themes, which had been identified as important to the organisation and prioritised by scrutiny members. It was explained that this would represent a move away from the existing practice of constituting Committees solely in opposition to Cabinet Member portfolios. It was explained that this

had caused committees to try to performance manage Cabinet Members and the Committee considered how it was felt this had led to a lack of focus with committees trying to do too much across sometime disparate portfolios of work. Instead, the Committee was interested to learn how the new thematic approach would allow scrutiny to take a more strategic approach to its work, focusing in on areas of major policy or service priority/change with a view to making impact through meaningful and timely recommendations to decision makers.

- 9.3 Following a detailed discussion the Committee discussed the replacement of the existing Policy and Scrutiny Committee structure with a revised Policy and Scrutiny Committee structure and noted that if approved the new structure would take effect from 27 September 2023.

**RESOLVED:**

That Full Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) The replacement of the existing Policy and Scrutiny Committee structure with a revised Policy and Scrutiny Committee structure as summarised in the report, and for this new structure to take effect from 27 September 2023, following the current round of committee meetings;
- 2) A revised Chapter 4 (“Policy and Scrutiny”) of the Council’s Constitution as set out at Appendix A of the report, including revised terms of reference for Policy and Scrutiny Committees, including the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 3) The delegation of authority to the Monitoring Officer to make other minor amendments to provisions in the Constitution consistent with the contents of this report.

(Councillor Shearer voted against the recommendations).

The Meeting ended at 7.11 pm

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

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