



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Climate Action, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Climate Action, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 6th December, 2023**, Rooms 18.01 – 18.03, Westminster City Hall - 18th Floor Rooms, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Jason Williams (Chair), Ruth Bush, Laila Cunningham, Patrick Lilley, Tim Mitchell, Ed Pitt Ford and Judith Southern.

Also Present: Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg (Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality). Officers: Jake Bacchus (Director of Finance), Francis Dwan (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Frances Martin (Executive Director of Environment and City), Darren Montague (Service Implementation Manager), Clare O’Keefe (Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor) and Jon Rowing (Head of Parking).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 The Committee noted that Councillor Ruth Bush was attending as substitute for Councillor James Small-Edwards.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of its meeting held on 31st July 2023.

3.2 RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31st July 2023 be agreed as a correct record of proceedings, subject to the following amendments:

- 1) That the second, third and fourth reference to ‘anti-idling’ is corrected to ‘idling’ in section 5.1, bullet point three.

4 CALL-IN: PARKING FEE STRUCTURE REVIEW

4.1 The Committee noted that it had convened to review a call-in brought by three of the Committee's Members - Councillors, Mitchell, Pitt Ford and Cunningham regarding the Cabinet Member Decision entitled 'Parking Fee Structure Review'.

4.2 A report responding to the reasons for the decision was introduced by the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality, Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg. Councillor Dimoldenberg outlined the changes, drawing on each element raised by Members who had called-in the decision, highlighting the impacts and contextualising some of the decisions made by comparing to neighbouring inner-London boroughs and the changes proposed. Councillor Dimoldenberg then responded to Members' questions on the following topics:

- Motivation: why the decision had been taken. Members also asked what else the decision could be motivated by if not, simply, to raise revenue.
- Benchmarking against neighbouring local authorities: clarity on examples provided in the introduction about trades people travelling and parking in other local authorities and what this meant for Westminster.
- Charges increasing: the changes proposed meaning more people would have to pay more as a result.
- Impact on people with dependants: acknowledging how the proposals could impact those with dependants, particularly young mothers or those caring for elderly family members, who currently benefit from cheap parking especially for electric vehicles (EVs). With this incentive potentially reduced then there is a risk of shifting to an increase in combustion vehicles. Members outlined that cheaper or free parking was a factor when considering purchasing an EV over a combustion vehicle.
- Cost of living: how seeking for services to be cost-effective can be right and contribute towards a fairer Westminster in a time of increasing cost-of-living.
- Phasing in charges: the current system was described as being unsustainably financed and Members queried the current levels of parking revenues, which are relatively high and then asked whether consideration had been given to phasing in the charges. This suggestion of phasing in charges was also asked with reference to the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) undertaken as part of the decision which had identified a potential greater impact on the elderly and those on low incomes.
- Impact on disabled parking: Members drew attention to instances when blue-badge holders are not able to find available disabled parking bays and instead parking in non-disabled bays. In these instances, Members highlighted that they would then be subject to higher charges under the proposals and asked if the Cabinet Member had considered this. Members also drew attention to

the increase in costs that would now face a disabled person coming to Westminster to visit even if they drove an EV.

- Problem of congestion: given congestion was listed as a central factor in the decision to make changes, Members asked how this had changed on the previous year and whether statistics were available and why they were not included in the report.
 - Clarity on incentive to drive EVs: whether the incentive to drive an EV would be greater or less than before they are imposed. Members suggested that the incentive to purchase an EV would be reduced as the cost of parking one increases relative to the cost of parking a combustion engine.
 - Underestimated impact on residents: clarifying whether the statistic that 95% of those affected would not be Westminster residents, following an example of a resident renting a car without having a permit.
 - Questioning the justification of benchmarking: referencing the declaration of the climate emergency and Westminster's position as a leader, Members questioned whether the Council's green and EV policies should be benchmarked against other local authorities rather than standing alone as a leader.
 - Trades people fees: Members highlighted that some trades people invoice for works and add parking as an expense. In these instances, any rise that they now face will directly be passed onto residents in Westminster and this would be felt whether the trades person drives an electric or non-electric vehicle. Members asked for acknowledgement that not everyone living in the areas referenced by the Cabinet Member in providing his response were wealthy. The Cabinet Member also referenced that the majority of vans on the road were not electric, which prompted a question about whether the Council should do more to incentivise the switch given this.
 - Individual autonomy: whether policies with the aim of helping people become less reliant on cars could remove freedoms from residents, taking away their choice to use the roads in their cars and whether this was something that the Council should pursue.
 - Notion of reset: it was asked whether this was the right time for a reset, given that only 20% of vehicles are currently electric and more work was needed in facilitating the continued change away from combustion engines.
- 4.3 The Committee noted comments by Members which focused on understanding that the percentage rises were not as significant in real terms as they initially appeared, the importance and safety of active travel, duty to the taxpayer as well as road users, dealing with pollutants, importance of differentiating between EVs and combustion vehicles, tackling congestion and the notion of reconceptualising this policy as a reset.

4.4 VOTE

4 – to note the report and take no further action.

3 – refer the decision back to the decision maker.

RESOLVED:

That no further action be taken and allow the Cabinet Member Decision to be implemented.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 The Committee noted that there was no other business to be discussed and the next meeting for the Committee is on 16th January 2024.

The meeting ended at 19.58.

CHAIR: _____

DATE _____