



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# **DRAFT MINUTES**

## **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Tuesday 18 November 2014** in Committee Rooms 3 & 4 - 17th Floor, City Hall.

**Members Present:** Councillors Ian Adams (Chairman), Brian Connell, David Harvey, Tim Mitchell and Barrie Taylor.

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.1 Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Barrie Taylor, who would be attending the Commission following another meeting. There were no changes to the membership.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 2.1 No declarations were received.

#### **3. MINUTES**

- 3.1 The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2014 as a correct record.

#### **4. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION AND UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

- 4.1 The Commission received an update on current and forthcoming issues from Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of the City Council, who also responded to questions.
- 4.2 The Leader updated the Commission on the progress that had been made by the West End Partnership over the past year; and on the Growth Deal for London which had been put forward by the London Enterprise Panel (LEP), which focussed on the areas of Employment Support, Skills Provision and Housing Investment and Supply. The Leader also outlined the budgetary challenges which were facing Westminster, which would require the City Council to find a further £100m of savings over the next three years.

- 4.3 The Commission noted that the development of the West End Partnership was progressing well. A shared vision document was to formally launched, which would focus on the key challenges and choices that faced the West End as it sought to maintain its heritage, amenity and vibrancy while promoting business and employment. As funding was limited, the City Council and West End Partnership had been working with the private sector to seek public realm improvements. Commission Members noted that the West End Partnership was also working with Transport for London (TfL) and the Mayor of London, to seek improvements to Oxford Street.
- 4.4 The Commission discussed the potential impact of Crossrail on the West End and surrounding Wards, and noted that the LEP had secured £236m from the Government's Local Growth Deal to support economic growth in the area and create at least 6,000 jobs and allow 5,000 homes to be built. Commission Members acknowledged that the advent of Crossrail would result in the West End getting bigger through the significant increase in people. The Leader confirmed that a mapping exercise would be undertaken to consider the effects of densification and the preservation of existing heritage, and to consider how any resulting development could contribute to the regeneration of Church Street and other areas.
- 4.5 The Commission discussed the Local Growth Deal, and noted that the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Mayor's Office were working together to secure more devolution to London from central Government. It was anticipated the devolution would be made to 5 cross-party groupings across London, with powers then devolving to individual boroughs within the grouping. The Leader commented that local authorities may be able to influence Business Rates, with businesses and local authorities meeting to produce a common model and set their own Rates. The Commission noted that Westminster produced 18.5% of London's economy, which was more than the City of London.
- 4.6 The Commission questioned the Leader about the relationship between Westminster and the Police, and on increased policing in the West End. The Leader acknowledged that the implementation of the local policing model had been a challenge to both the City Council and the Police, and continued to be a source of concern amongst communities where there was less visible policing than perhaps was the case five years ago. Commission Members suggested that crime statistics should be reviewed in areas which were not receiving additional resources.
- 4.7 The Leader commented that despite the financial context in which the Police and local authority were operating, processes were considered to be operationally strong. The Commission noted that strategic functions such as decision making and priority setting were increasingly being made at a London-wide level, and that the approach to forward planning and partnership working similarly needed to be conducted across London, rather than on the basis of individual boroughs.
- 4.8 Commission Members discussed Tri-borough working and highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability, and of outputs being based on

effectiveness in addition to efficiencies. The Leader confirmed that Tri-borough was not solely based on efficiency, and that the three partner boroughs had been able to share best practice. The Leader offered to provide Commission Members with a list of Tri-borough successes, which included providing specialist libraries; reducing the time taken to complete care proceedings from 52 weeks to 26 weeks; and being able to find more appropriate placements for fostering.

- 4.9 Commission Members discussed Localism, and the transfer of assets and delegation of financing to the Queens Park Community Council. The Leader confirmed that she would not support the Council transferring assets to an independent body, but would consider transferring management responsibilities to the Community Council if it provided a business case that demonstrated the financial stability to bid for services and operate contracts.
- 4.10 The Commission noted that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had reported that 1 in 5 of GP practices were failing and were likely to close, and commented on the further issue of GP practices being forced to close when properties were sold by the owners, or when rents were raised by private landlords. The Leader recognised the problem, and commented that as there was currently no co-ordinated oversight on the location of GP practices in London, NHS England should be requested to take a more strategic approach to ensure that demand was met. Commission Members acknowledged that there was a strong case for larger practices, with a balance of good doctors and good management. It was agreed that although Westminster may not have a strategic role, the City Council could utilise its powers relating to Planning and changes of use when landlords tried to convert GP practices into residential property.
- 4.11 The Commission highlighted the value of Social Enterprise, and noted the success of the business hubs in Church Street and at New Zealand House in Piccadilly, where people had collaborated to pitch new business.
- 4.12 Other issues raised by Commission Members and commented on by the Leader included the Better Care Fund and the ongoing integration of Health and Social Care; the potential impact of 24 hour tube trains; and Sunday trading.
- 4.13 The Commission thanked the Leader for attending the meeting.

## **5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION FINANCE REFORM PAPER**

- 5.1 Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Manager) presented the interim report of the Independent Commission on Local Government, 'Public Money, Local Choice', which sought to make recommendations for the reform of local government finance and find better ways to fund local services and promote economic growth.
- 5.2 The report sought to address five key challenges which faced the country within the context of lower public spending:
- Promoting economic growth and investment in infrastructure.

- Ensuring sufficient housing is provided in every place.
- Integrating the health and social care systems to promote independent living, including preventing unnecessary health interventions.
- Achieving a welfare benefits system that promotes work and protects the vulnerable.
- Supporting families and developing young lives through early intervention.

5.3 The Independent Commission also considered that the reform could provide an opportunity to provide a funding system for local government which was largely self-sufficient, and which should include powers to set Council Tax Bands locally, revalue properties and raise additional revenues.

5.4 The Scrutiny Commission noted that the key areas set out in the Reform Paper were being supported by Westminster's Policy and Scrutiny Committees. Members acknowledged that submitting a response would provide an opportunity to highlight the work that had been achieved, particularly in relation to health and children's services, and to be part of the debate to align national and local priorities.

5.5 The Scrutiny Commission agreed that a draft response which sets out the work and achievements of Westminster's Scrutiny Committees be prepared and submitted to Members electronically, to establish whether there is enough substance to submit a response to the reform paper.

## **6. EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY & SCRUTINY**

6.1 Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Manager) presented a report which outlined some of the results of the changes which had followed the transformation of the Policy & Scrutiny function in 2012. The report also identified some potential areas for further development.

6.2 The Commission acknowledged that many issues addressed by Scrutiny were cross-cutting, and agreed that the successes achieved by Scrutiny Committees should be highlighted to ensure that the value of the work was recognised.

6.3 The Commission suggested that issues for future scrutiny could be guided by taking account of public agendas, such as forthcoming legislation and the work of Select Committees, with resources and funding being sought from other agencies. Members also discussed the possibility of agreeing a three or four year scrutiny work programme, which could have more focus on major cross-cutting issues and on research into strategy.

6.4 Commission Members noted that a consultation log was maintained by the Communications Department, and suggested that this be attached to the Work Programme report at future meetings to inform the Commission of areas for potential scrutiny. Members also commented on scrutiny training, and on the structure of Scrutiny Committees having less focus on Executive functions.

6.5 Commission Members suggested that Scrutiny Chairmen undertake a self-assessment at the end of each Council year, to review what their Committees have achieved.

6.6 The Commission agreed that the ongoing effectiveness of Scrutiny should be reviewed in 6-9 months time.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

7.1 The next stage of the reorganisation of the City Council's officer structure was now the subject of consultation. The Commission noted that the Chief Executive had suggested that a further meeting of the Scrutiny Commission be held in December, at which he could make a presentation and the proposals be discussed.

7.2 Commission Members considered that the timing of any comments on the process was important, and that a meeting to discuss the proposals in December maybe too soon, and ineffective in view of the ongoing 30 working day consultation period.

7.3 The Commission suggested that it receive the outcome of the current consultation, and then consider whether any key issues or substantial concerns which have been raised should be discussed at an additional meeting in the new year.

## **8. TRI-BOROUGH SCRUTINY**

8.1 The Commission discussed the effectiveness of Tri-borough scrutiny, and highlighted issues which would benefit from a Tri-borough review, such as special needs, school transport and school meals.

8.2 The Commission acknowledged that problems remained in arranging meetings with Westminster's partner boroughs, and agreed that the issue of Tri-borough scrutiny should be included on the agenda for the forthcoming meeting of Tri-borough Leaders. Members also agreed that Tri-borough working should similarly be taken into account in the next review of the effectiveness of scrutiny at Westminster.

## **9. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

9.1 The Meeting ended at 8.42 pm.

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

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