



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

DRAFT MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Tuesday 12 May 2015** at 7.00pm in Committee Rooms 3 & 4 - 17th Floor, City Hall.

Members Present: Councillors Ian Adams (Chairman), Brian Connell, David Harvey, Andrew Smith and Barrie Taylor.

Also present: Councillor Philippa Roe.

1. MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 Councillor Andrew Smith attended as replacement for Councillor Tim Mitchell, who had become Cabinet Member for Finance & Corporate Services. There were no other changes to Membership.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Ian Adams declared that he was an acting NHS Director with three neighbouring Clinical Commissioning Groups, which had no remit over Westminster.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2014 as a correct record.

4. UPDATE AND QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE CITY 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 commented on the devolution of powers from Central Government to London Councils, which had been gaining cross-party momentum across London, and considered that the agenda for devolution

would now accelerate following the recent General Election. The Leader also commented on progress in implementing the new three-year *City for All* vision, which would focus on delivery of Westminster as a:

- City of Aspiration - reducing long-term unemployment and seeking to ensure that people could fulfil their full potential, with communities being able to share in the economic prosperity of Westminster.
- City of Choice - creating opportunities for people to make responsible choices for themselves, their families and their neighbourhood, and to live more healthy lifestyles; and
- City of Heritage - taking forward the commitment to protect and enhance the fabric and character of Westminster, while sensitively encouraging growth and new business.

- 4.3 The Leader recognised the problems of radicalisation and the need to build on community cohesion; and highlighted that being a diverse global destination was one of Westminster strengths.
- 4.4 The Commission discussed devolution, and agreed that it was important for Westminster to gain maximum opportunity from the devolution agenda. Although London Councils were largely in agreement with the proposals for skills, business and employment, health was more controversial as London hospitals often provided services for visitors from other countries. The Commission considered that the cost of public health could be driven down through better management; and commented on the on-going development of a model for local and co-commissioning against a background of an aging population. The Commission commended Councillor Rachael Robathan (Cabinet Member for Adults & Public Health) in building a good working relationship with the NHS.
- 4.5 The Commission discussed the City Council's housing strategy, and highlighted the need for more intermediate housing to be made available for the middle sector. The Leader acknowledged the problems associated with a polarised society, and confirmed that cross-party discussions to address the need for intermediate housing were on-going. The Commission discussed the possible use of funding obtained from planning agreements in the delivery of housing within and outside of Westminster. Members also noted that the Land Commission was looking at 'languishing sites' within London boroughs which could be used to provide housing; and that there was the possibility of a tax being levied on vacant land.
- 4.6 The Commission discussed the broader vision of supporting small and medium sized business enterprises in Westminster, which could deliver employment and boost the economy. The Commission also commented on the poor quality of broadband services, and noted that BT was being lobbied to improve the quality and efficiency of broadband services which would provide better support for small businesses.
- 4.7 Members commended the performance of Westminster's schools and acknowledged that many secondary school places were being taken by children from other boroughs.

4.8 The Commission agreed that each of Westminster's Policy & Scrutiny Committees would consider specific issues within the devolution agenda that fell within their Terms of Reference, and that strategic issues would be submitted to the Commission.

4.9 The Commission thanked the Leader for attending the meeting.

5. UPDATE AND QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

5.1 The Commission received an update on current and forthcoming corporate issues from Charlie Parker (Chief Executive), who also responded to questions.

5.2 The Chief Executive commented on progress in the on-going restructure and changes that were taking place in delivering the *Westminster Way* programme, which sought to make Westminster an organisation that was fit for purpose and prepared for pan-London devolution.

5.3 The Commission discussed the resilience of Departments within the City Council, and noted that staffing remained an issue as higher salaries could often be obtained outside of local authorities. Members noted that the recruitment and retention of social workers also remained a problem. The Chief Executive confirmed that measures were being taken to improve staffing, which included incentives such as graduate trainee programmes.

5.4 The Commission discussed the potential impact of the devolution of powers to London Councils and the future of central government funding, and acknowledged that the proportion of government savings that would fall upon local authorities would continue to present a major challenge. The Chief Executive highlighted the need for the City Council to develop a greater role of strategic leadership; and to develop a better understanding of commercial opportunities and think more creatively about income streams. The Commission recognised that Westminster was unique, with its own specific issues and focus; and noted that policy frameworks were being put in place for the growth agenda that would support income coming back into the City Council, and maintain Westminster and the West End as an international investment opportunity.

5.5 Members discussed the services that would be provided by the City Council in 5 years' time, and how they would be delivered. The Chief Executive considered that adult social care and health would change dramatically, with different payment structures and with more home support being provided for an older population. The Chief Executive also considered that the City Council would continue to support improved performance in schools, while the scale of Westminster's involvement in housing may change. Although core street based services would remain a local authority function, funding could be different; and the market for the third sector and social enterprise would grow, with more Trusts being created.

- 5.6 The Commission commented on the results of the Staff and City Surveys, and on the effect the on-going reorganisation was having on staff morale. Although the changes would lead on to future benefits, the Chief Executive acknowledged the impact on morale as staff numbers were reduced, and highlighted the need to support people in dealing with challenges and being more resilient during a difficult period of austerity. It was also important for existing experience and knowledge to be transitioned to new workers.
- 5.7 Members commented on the increase in instances of bullying and harassment which had been revealed in the Staff Survey, and which appeared to be a Tri-Borough issue. The Chief Executive acknowledged that the number of reported cases had risen, and commented that bullying by members of the public had increased. The Commission noted that the number of cases could have increased in response to staff now having a greater ability and confidence to report bullying, and agreed that consideration could be given to adding the issue of bullying and harassment to the scrutiny work programme.
- 5.8 Other issues discussed included initial difficulties associated with the new Agresso contract for Tri-Borough Shared Services; the use and future of NHS Estates in Westminster; and the building infrastructure at City Hall.
- 5.9 The Commission thanked the Chief Executive for attending the meeting.

6. POLICY & SCRUTINY

- 6.1 Mark Ewbank (Scrutiny Manager) commented on work undertaken by Westminster's Policy & Scrutiny Committees, which was to be set out in an Annual Report. The Commission discussed Committees having headline Task Groups, such as devolution or the whole family approach.
- 6.2 A 'Reception & Review' for back-bench Members which would provide an opportunity to comment on the induction programme for new Members and on work undertaken during the past year was to take place in The Mayor's Parlour, at 6.45pm on 16 June. Members would also be able to consider whether they would benefit from any future training, interact with key officers, and.
- 6.3 Commission Members also commented on the annual two-day event staged by the Centre for Public Scrutiny; and suggested that Ward Members were notified of the event, which would describe how scrutiny operated in a broader context. The Commission agreed that details of the event would be highlighted in the Westminster Information Bulletin. Commission Members also commented on the role of the London Scrutiny Network, and on the use of the Scrutiny Budget.

7. COUNCILLOR MELVYN CAPLAN

- 7.1 The Commission commended the work undertaken by Councillor Melvyn Caplan, who had recently stood down as Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate & Customer Services.

8. TERMINATION OF MEETING

8.1 The Meeting ended at 8.40 pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____