



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# **DRAFT MINUTES**

## **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Tuesday 29 November 2016** at 7.00pm in Committee Rooms 3 & 4 - 17th Floor, City Hall.

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

**Also present:** Councillor Baroness Philippa Couttie (Leader of the City Council).

#### **1. LEADER OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

- 1.1 The Commission wished to formally record its thanks to Baroness Philippa Couttie for her work and achievements during her time as Leader of the City Council, which had been of benefit to Westminster's residents, businesses and visitors.

#### **2. MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 No apologies for absence were received.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 3.1 No declarations were received.

#### **4. MINUTES**

- 4.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2016 as a correct record.

#### **5. THE WEST END PARTNERSHIP**

- 5.1 Baroness Philippa Couttie (Leader of the City Council) and Charlie Parker (Chief Executive) presented a report which considered the achievements of the West End Partnership (WEP), and which reviewed the arrangements for

the delivery of the Oxford Street Project. The report also provided an update on the Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) proposal that had been submitted to HM Treasury to support the programme.

- 5.2 The Commission noted that the WEP had presented an opportunity for Westminster to work closely and effectively with a wide range of partners, to improve and refresh the West End and adjoining areas. The WEP also sought to support businesses and refresh the infrastructure of the West End, to maintain it as a world destination during a time of economic uncertainty; and in the face of strong international competition, when other major cities were investing heavily in improvement programmes to reduce transport and increase productivity.
- 5.3 To ensure that the vision for the West End became a reality, the WEP's delivery plan focussed on three core areas:
- People: Improving the lives of those who work, live in and visit the West End such as through better air quality and better compliance with noise and other regulations.
  - Place: Maintaining the West End as a place of vital importance in the UK's capital city by improving public places and attracting quality property development.
  - Prosperity: Increasing the economic prosperity of the West End, London and the UK for all, including access to jobs, skills and business opportunities.
- 5.4 The Leader highlighted the need to continue seeking to tackle unemployment, and to ensure that jobs arising from the WEP were taken by residents of Westminster and Camden. The Commission acknowledged that different programmes were needed for different cohorts such as the long-term unemployed, who needed to be job-ready in terms of education and expectation.
- 5.5 The Commission discussed the health and future of the retail sector, and the Chief Executive commented on the ongoing restructure of the high street in which the retail offer was changing, and could be further effected by the combination of the business rate revaluation and the impact of the living wage. Brexit could also affect currency, and lead to imports becoming more expensive. The Commission acknowledged that business rates could be prohibitive and compel some businesses to move to other cities in the UK, and highlighted the need for the West End to maintain a strong and attractive investment profile. In order to further develop the West End and Oxford Street as a retail experience, improvements needed to be made to the public realm to create space for doing things in a different way. Consideration would also need to be given to buildings having secondary uses to keep them viable. The Leader highlighted the need to support all businesses in the West End, and the Commission noted that a decline in the retail sector and tourism could lead to a down-turn in restaurants and theatres.
- 5.6 The Leader commended the success of the City Council and WEP in influencing the Mayor of London on the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street and reduction in bus numbers, and in considering the wider area surrounding

Oxford Street. It was however recognised that the aspiration to pedestrianise was a challenge that could not be extended the whole of Oxford Street, and that closing the street for 24 hours would similarly not be practical.

- 5.7 The Commission discussed the need to reduce vehicle activity, and noted that after Crossrail had come into effect the City Council would be seeking a reduction in traffic of 70%, which would include buses and mini-cabs. The number of mini-cabs in operation in Central London had risen from 50,000 to 120,000 over the past three years; and Commission Members commented on the use of electric vehicles, and on the subsidies being made available in other European Cities such as Oslo where 25% of vehicles were electric.
- 5.8 The Commission discussed the work being undertaken by the Air Quality Task Group to improve air quality in the West End, and acknowledged that pavements could not be widened unless there was a sufficient reduction in the number of busses that would reduce congestion and improve the flow of traffic. Members also highlighted the importance of strategies for cycling and pedestrians.
- 5.9 Other issues discussed included future investment from the Government post Brexit; the wider benefits to the economy arising from financial success in London; the successful working relationship between the City Council, the WEP and Transport for London; and the importance of residents being represented on the WEP.
- 5.10 Commission Members highlighted the need for effective and appropriate public scrutiny of the activities of the WEP that were taking place. The Leader agreed that there was a role for an appropriate form of scrutiny of the WEP, which should be undertaken at least annually. The Chief Executive also agreed that some form of scrutiny would be required if the City Council was successful in its TIF proposal. The Commission requested that Officers look for other examples of comparative partnership delivery and public investment, to determine which model for scrutiny would be most appropriate and effective for the WEP.

## **6. DRAFT SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**

- 6.1 Muge Dindjer (Policy & Scrutiny Manager) presented the draft Annual Report of work undertaken by Westminster's Policy & Scrutiny Committees during the municipal year June 2015 to May 2016. The Report sought to highlight the key areas that each Committee had focussed, and Commission Members were invited to consider the work of their Committees and identify any additional impacts or areas of achievement that should be highlighted. The Commission noted that publication of the Report would be mainly on line, with printed copies being provided for stakeholders.
- 6.2 Commission Members discussed the format and content of the Annual Report, and suggested that it should focus on what had been contributed and achieved by the Scrutiny process in Westminster. The Commission agreed that the sections relating to the individual Committees would be made shorter, and that the Report should be referred to the City Council's Communications

Department for formatting prior to its publication.

- 6.3 The Commission agreed that consideration would be given to Policy & Scrutiny Committees undertaking a review and self-assessment in the last cycle of each year, to consider what had been achieved during the past municipal year. Commission Members suggested that the review could also include details of the costs that had been incurred in officer time and other resources.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 Muge Dindjer (Policy & Scrutiny Manager) presented a report which set out the future Work Programme of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, based on the requests made at the previous meeting of the Commission in June.
- 7.2 The Commission discussed issues for its next meeting in April 2017, and noted that the Westminster People Strategy was now to be considered by the Housing, Finance & Corporate Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in January. The Commission agreed that the April meeting would focus on a question and answer session with the new Leader of the City Council; and on Tri-borough working and the Managed Services programme.

## **8. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

- 8.1 The Meeting ended at 8.26 pm.

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

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