



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

DRAFT MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Wednesday 27 September 2017** at 6.30pm in Rooms 3.9 and 3.10 - 3rd Floor, 5 Strand, London WC2 5HR

Members Present: Councillors Brian Connell (Chairman), Tony Devenish, Jonathan Glanz, Andrew Smith and Barrie Taylor.

Also present: Councillor Nickie Aiken (Leader of the City Council).

1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to Membership. All Members of the Commission were present.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No declarations were received.

3. MINUTES

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2017 were approved as a correct record.

3.2 Matters Arising

3.2.1 Minute 4.6 - Sustainability & Transformation Plan (STP): Members repeated the request made at the Adults, Health & Public Protection Policy & Scrutiny Committee to receive the minutes from meetings of the Joint Health & Care Transformation Group, which sought to deliver the STP for North West London. The Chief Executive agreed to clarify whether the minutes were available.

4. THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

4.1 Councillor Nickie Aiken (Leader of the City Council) provided an update on current and forthcoming issues within her portfolio, which included progress in the City Plan and the interim statement of Westminster's new approach to housing delivery; Community Cohesion; and the move from tri-borough to bi-borough.

- 4.2.1 The Commission discussed the possible effect of Brexit, and noted the impact that it could have on the provision of social care; the labour supply for areas such as the construction industry; and on specialist areas of research. An article in the Evening Standard and supporting press release had reported that the Leader had joined with the Leaders of RB Kensington & Chelsea and LB Wandsworth to write to Michel Barnier (EU Chief Negotiator), urging him to work more closely with the government to provide clarity and secure the residencies of European nationals following Brexit. The Leader acknowledged that Westminster's EU residents were Council Tax payers, who played a significant role in their neighbourhoods and in providing essential services in many public sector areas. The Commission agreed that both sides needed to recognise the human element of the negotiations, and prioritise securing the rights of residents.
- 4.2.2 The Commission also discussed the potential impact of Brexit on the business and reputation of the City, and noted that there were indications of a softening in the development market and in the letting of commercial space. A large proportion of essential skills in the health sector and building industry were currently provided by EU nationals, which had caused concerns over the labour supply post-Brexit. Concerns over the future of specialist research were also being raised, as grants at a number of institutions and universities were at risk, and foreign nationals were unsure of their future status and were seeking jobs elsewhere.
- 4.3.1 The Leader commented on progress in the delivery of the City Plan, and on the commitment to provide 1,800 affordable homes by 2022. The Commission noted that the property industry and landowners were aware of the reasons for the greater focus on the provision of affordable homes, and had shown a better understanding and willingness to work with the City Council.
- 4.3.2 Members highlighted the need to consider innovative building techniques in new developments, which could make better use of available space by delivering a greater number of smaller units while also meeting the criteria for size set by the Mayor of London. It was acknowledged that there would still be some exceptional circumstances where the payment of a commuted sum could be more appropriate than the provision of affordable homes.
- 4.3.3 The Commission commented on the number of young people and families who were seeking accommodation in Westminster, and discussed the benefits of revisiting existing planning consents which had not been implemented, and which could provide rented accommodation for people who were active and present in the community. Members suggested that living space could also be increased by a change to planning conditions that would ensure residential elements within properties were let before office use could commence.
- 4.4.1 The Commission discussed the measures that were being taken to improve air quality, and the Leader confirmed that Westminster was continuing to work with business partners and other boroughs to reduce pollution. Stuart Love (Acting Interim Chief Executive) acknowledged that although the ability of the differing groups to work together had improved significantly over the last 12 to 18 months, more needed to be done and action taken to further reduce

emissions from property and transport. Officers were also reviewing possible conflicts in the City Council's policies.

- 4.4.2 Members commented on the benefits of electric vehicles and of using electric scooters for deliveries, and noted that the Mayor of London's 40% reduction in the number of buses in Oxford Street would continue, and would in future result in only two bus routes which operated electric vehicles. The Leader confirmed that Licensing approvals for transport in Westminster now included a condition that only electric vehicles could be used. Members also commented on air quality within public transport, and suggested that Transport for London could be encouraged to introduce the technology to clean and purify the air in the London Underground.
- 4.4.3 The Commission highlighted the need to avoid constructing tall buildings by busy roads, which could concentrate and retain pollution by placing two buildings along busy road; and to also avoid building schools next to busy roads.
- 4.5 Members informed the Leader of a proposal made at the Adults, Health & Public Protection Policy & Scrutiny Committee that Public Health should undertake a Health & Wellbeing survey in Westminster, which could provide indicators that could inform key issues and priorities. The Leader agreed with the proposal, which could be particularly relevant for young people.
- 4.6 The Commission sought clarification of progress in implementation of the Sustainability & Transformation Plan (STP) for North West London. The Acting Interim Chief Executive acknowledged that the STP comprised of a complex set of proposals, and agreed to provide Members with a written briefing.
- 4.7 The Leader reported that the Council Budget for 2018-19 would be announced in November 2017, rather than at the end of the financial year.

5. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

- 5.1 Stuart Love (Acting Interim Chief Executive) provided an update on matters of corporate interest, which included the corporate response to Grenfell; the Health & Social Care Sustainability & Transformation Plan (STP); Devolution and Public Service Transformation.
- 5.2.1 The Commission discussed the City Council's role in responding to the Grenfell fire, and sought clarification of the organisational impact of Westminster's involvement. The Acting Interim Chief Executive confirmed that the City Council had been invited to set up a structure at Portland House to accommodate the response team, and to oversee the relocation of displaced residents. The Commission commended Officers and Members for taking a leading role when required, and highlighted the cross-departmental working that had involved 150 members of staff working long hours over four weeks. Westminster's Emergency Plan had been considered a model of best practice, and the City Council had been complimented on how it had responded to Grenfell and on the effectiveness of its staff. The Acting Interim

Chief Executive confirmed that diverting resources had affected the City Council's ability to perform, particularly in the housing function and in the stock for housing allocation.

- 5.2.2 The Commission discussed the impact that working closely with the aftermath of Grenfell may have had on staff. Although the Acting Interim Chief Executive did not consider that morale had been negatively affected, he acknowledged the need for provision to be made for any delayed support or counselling that may be needed. The Commission noted that staff had received honorariums for outstanding additional work, and were also receiving recognition through a Council-wide response which included the Staff Awards, the Staff Conference, and a reception in the Mayor's Parlour.
- 5.2.3 The Commission noted that Westminster's Finance team were still overseeing financial element of the response, and sought clarification of the financial implications for the City Council. Stuart Love confirmed that a Memorandum of Understanding agreed with the government, the Greater London Authority and London Councils provided for mutual aid in the case of emergency, but had not been designed for a situation like Grenfell. It had however been agreed that local authorities could reclaim staffing expenses over £100,000 which were incurred in assisting neighbouring boroughs. The Commission noted that while Westminster had performed some functions for which it would not be reimbursed, it would be eligible to claim staffing costs associated with the Grenfell response from LB Kensington & Chelsea. The Acting Interim Chief Executive confirmed that the City Council would similarly be seeking reimbursement of the rent for the floor at Portland House, together with other costs. Both Westminster and RB Kensington & Chelsea would also be seeking to access funds from the government's Bellwin scheme, which offered emergency assistance.
- 5.2.4 The Acting Interim Chief Executive acknowledged that there were still lessons to be learned that would enable the City Council to further improve, and confirmed that a review of Westminster's response to Grenfell and to the recent terror attacks was currently being undertaken, which would be referred to scrutiny. In view of the cross-cutting nature of the response, Members agreed that the review should be submitted to the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, and should include an evaluation of the process and outcome of the application for funding.
- 5.2.5 Central Government continued to maintain an overview of the progress being made by RB Kensington & Chelsea in response to the fire. The Commission noted that Grenfell could have significant long-term implications, if areas of responsibility moved to local government without the provision of additional resources.
- 5.2.6 Other issues relating to the City Council's response to the Grenfell fire included the distinction in accountability between health partners and the local authority in recognising borough boundaries; the effective contribution of the voluntary sector; channeling the generosity of the public; and the importance of community cohesion and trust.

5.3 Members also discussed progress in joint working with the Metropolitan Police to provide a new system of CCTV in Westminster, and noted that the Police were proposing camera locations at 65 sites, rather than the previous 75. Although the timing of the project was out of the City Council's control, it was hoped that the new system would become operational before the Christmas/New Year period. Stuart Love agreed to provide the Commission with a more detailed written update.

5.4 The Commission noted that Charlie Parker would be leaving Westminster on 31 December, to become Chief Executive for the States of Jersey. Stuart Love would become Acting Chief Executive on 1 January 2018, and it was anticipated that a new Chief Executive would be in place by early May.

6. 2017-18 WORK PROGRAMME

6.1 Aaron Hardy (Policy & Scrutiny Officer) presented the current Work Programme for the Commission, and invited Members to consider the scope of items to be presented to the next meeting on 30 November.

6.2 It was agreed that the meeting would focus on the emergency response to the recent fire at Grenfell Tower and the lessons that had been learnt. An update on the Corporate Transformation Programme would also be included in the agenda, or held over to the following meeting in March. The Commission requested that the standing reports from the Leader and Chief Executive include updates on Community Cohesion and Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

6.3 In response to the lateness of reports to Scrutiny Committees, the Commission agreed that agenda papers should be submitted to Committee Members no later than five days before the meeting unless there were special circumstances. It was further agreed that to enable effective scrutiny, responses to requests for further information should be sought within two weeks of the date of the meeting.

7. CLOSE OF MEETING

7.1 The Meeting ended at 8.07 pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____