



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

DRAFT MINUTES

Communities & Customer Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Communities & Customer Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee** held on **Monday 4 March 2019**, Rooms 18.01, 18.02 and 18.03, 17th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP

Members Present: Councillors Tim Barnes (Chairman), Lorraine Dean, Richard Elcho, Murad Gassanly, Louise Hyams, Andrea Mann, Guthrie McKie and Hamza Taouzzale.

Also Present: Councillors Iain Bott, Emily Payne and Paul Swaddle.

1. MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 Councillor Tim Barnes was nominated to be the new Chairman of the Committee and was duly appointed.
- 1.2 There were no apologies for absence. All Members were present.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 No declarations were made.

3. CABINET MEMBER UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES & DIGITAL

- 3.1 Councillor Paul Swaddle presented a report which informed the Committee of key issues within his portfolio. Priorities included improving the customer experience with a new approach to customer services handling; establishing a Customer & Digital Standards Board; short-term improvements to Westminster's website with a view to a complete overhaul; and developing an application (app) strategy to improve the customer experience.
- 3.2 Although Westminster currently fell behind industry in its digital offer, solutions were already available. The Microsoft Dynamics platform for customer service

management was to be implemented at the end of April and would enable the City Council to join up enquiries and provide better information. The aspiration was for the City Council to become a leading local authority in providing excellent digital services.

- 3.3 The Committee also heard from Councillor Emily Payne (Deputy Cabinet Member), who would be reviewing the City Council's approach to call centres, which included CityWest Homes; and from Ezra Wallace (Head of City Policy & Strategy) and Ben Goward (Chief Information Officer).
- 3.4 The Cabinet Member considered that the existing digital systems which formed the foundation of Westminster's customer services and call-centres needed to be reviewed and improved. Councillor Swaddle had been pleased to find that staff had already been highlighting the need for a better system, but had been held back by the previous structure in which different elements of customer service were done separately without co-ordination.
- 3.5 The Digital Board would comprise of the Cabinet Member, Deputy and City Council Officers, who would seek to provide an oversight of significant Council initiatives that would impact customer experience; bring all of the customer service teams together; and promote the right standards. It was important that data could be shared between systems in different departments, to increase efficiency and improve customer experience while driving down costs and freeing resources for non-digital services.
- 3.6 The Board would encourage innovation and enable concepts and ideas to be brought into action; and would seek to design services around customers by involving them in a meaningful way and listening to their views. Committee Members highlighted the need for the views of young people to be taken into account in shaping customer services. The Board would also review the Westminster City Save Card and Library Card and consider whether the two cards could be brought together, with data being shared digitally to identify how a better experience could be provided.
- 3.7 Committee Members highlighted the role of the City Council as a people-based organisation, and expressed concern that the digital transformation was leading to a reduction in face to face contact. The Committee also agreed that a fundamental purpose of customer services was to make life easier for the most vulnerable in society. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the need to ensure that customers still had the option of face to face personal contact and confirmed that improving customer facing would be an important first step. A number of visits had been planned that would enable the views of service users to be heard.
- 3.8 Committee Members were invited to highlight any problems or opportunities in customer or digital services, and it was hoped that timelines for the review and substantive deliverables could be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting.

4. CABINET MEMBER UPDATE: SPORTS, CULTURE & COMMUNITY

- 4.1 Councillor Iain Bott presented a report which informed the Committee of current and forthcoming issues within his portfolio. Priorities included physical activity, leisure and sport; major projects and programmes; and the Outdoor Adventurous Learning Centre at Sayers Croft in Surrey which was managed by the City Council. The Cabinet Member commended the quality of the services that were being delivered to Westminster's residents, businesses and visitors; and highlighted the work of the voluntary and community sector in supporting the Abbey Community Centre and Westminster Advice Services. Councillor Bott also commented on progress in finalising the City Council's Cultural Vision; the Westminster Green Plaque Scheme; and designations for Assets of Community Value.
- 4.2 The Committee also heard from Andy Durrant (Director of Community Services), Eugene Minogue (Head of Physical Activity, Leisure & Sport) and Ezra Wallace (Head of City Policy & Strategy).
- 4.3 The Active Westminster Strategy set out the City Council's ambitions for physical activity, leisure and sport, and how the Council and its partners would work together to achieve these ambitions. Improvements to the digital service through the use of open data, an improved website and the introduction of a new ActiveWestminster Card had resulted in customers being better informed and the process for booking activities made easier.
- 4.4 The Committee discussed the use of sports facilities and open spaces in Westminster and highlighted the importance of young people remaining active. Members acknowledged the need to create a more permissive and supportive environment for physical activity, leisure and sport, and supported the removal of the restrictive 'No Ball Games' signs and Byelaws. The Cabinet Member confirmed that many of the signs had already been removed, and that Cabinet would be reviewing policy to ensure that the changes were made with caution and would not lead to noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour. The Committee commented on most of the game areas in Westminster being located in the north of the borough, and noted that this was largely due to the availability of schools and localities. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the City Council continued to look for suitable game areas across Westminster.
- 4.5 The Cabinet Member updated the Committee on the development of Westminster's Culture Strategy, which would be referred to the Committee for comment prior to publication. The Committee acknowledged that Westminster was a world destination for culture, with an excellent offer for theatres, museums and galleries. Members highlighted the aim of embedding culture into Westminster's open spaces and agreed that items which may have been archived could be displayed in a better way in places such as City Hall.

- 4.6 The Committee discussed the Green Plaque scheme and agreed that many aspects of the history of Westminster needed to be commemorated. The Cabinet Member commented that while applications such as that made for GCHQ could be worthy, others could be submitted by businesses for promotion. The scheme for Green Plaques needed to be clarified and strengthened, and the City Council had been looking at the criteria used by English Heritage as part of a review. Committee Members highlighted the need for more women to be commemorated. It was noted that the guidelines for Assets of Community Value were clear and guided by legislation, and that designation required community use.
- 4.7 Other issues discussed included dance and activity schemes for people with learning disabilities; the use of facilities at the Chelsea Barracks Sports Centre by local residents; the programme for primary schools at Paddington Recreation Ground; and progress in the refurbishment works at Lisson Green, Jubilee House and the Porchester Spa. The Cabinet Member agreed to provide an update on the Westminster Advice Service at the next meeting.

5. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

- 5.1 Aaron Hardy (Scrutiny Manager) invited Members to consider topics for the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/20, which could have a tangible impact on the way residents accessed services. The Committee noted that a Task Group had been created to review access to culture in Westminster had now held an initial meeting, and was scheduled to report back to this Committee in September 2019.
- 5.2 The Committee highlighted the important role of libraries as information networks for cultural activities, and noted that some of the issues raised by the existing Libraries Task Group could impact on the work of the Cultural Task Group. Measures were being taken to avoid duplication, and to ensure that the work of the two Task Groups was coordinated. It was noted that although the timetable for the Libraries Task Group would not allow the Committee to make a formal contribution, there was still time for Members to feed into the report.
- 5.3 Members noted that contracts for voluntary and community services were due to be renewed in 2020, and agreed that a review of the commissioning strategy should be added to the Work Programme with representatives from the voluntary sector being invited to the Committee. The Committee also agreed to consider the development of the IT Technology Strategy which underpinned contact centres; and at how the City Council delivered services and supported internal staff. The Committee also suggested that a Task Group could be established to identify local authorities that were providing excellent digital services, and to consider how they could be brought into use in Westminster.

5.4 Other issues suggested for the work programme included a review of Westminster's call-centres; and the guidelines for Westminster's Green Plaque scheme. The Committee acknowledged the value that could be gained from involving external witnesses in scrutiny meetings; together with the importance of effectively engaging young people.

5.5 The Committee agreed that while the long-list of potential issues was being compiled, some initial areas of work should be identified for discussion at its next meeting on 24 June.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 No further business was reported.

The Meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

CHAIRMAN:_____

DATE:_____