



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Westminster Scrutiny Commission** held on **Thursday 25 April, 2019**, Westminster City Council, Room 18.02, 18th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Tony Devenish, Jonathan Glanz, Adam Hug and Karen Scarborough.

Also Present: Stuart Love (Chief Executive), Lee Witham (Director of People's Services), Aruj Haider (Head of Organisational Development), Artemis Kassi (Scrutiny Officer) and Andrew Palmer (Committee & Governance Services).

1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to Membership.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No declarations were made.

3 MINUTES

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2018 were approved as a correct record.

4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

4.1 Stuart Love (Chief Executive) provided an update on current and forthcoming key issues of corporate interest, which included the impact of Brexit; the transition of CityWest Homes to an in-house service; and the Place Strategy and Delivery Plan for the Oxford Street District. The update also included the transfer of managed services to the Hampshire Partnership; and pay gaps at the City Council.

4.2 Westminster had continued to play a key role in London's preparedness and response to Brexit, and had been working closely with London Councils and national partners to manage and mitigate risks where possible. In addition to the risk of the potential economic impact to business and on the City Council's

budgets, key issues under consideration included the impact of Brexit on the workforce, particularly within adult social care, highways maintenance and construction; the loss of workers in key industries such as construction and hospitality. The City Council had also continued to play a significant role in managing protests and demonstrations taking place in Westminster, including hate crime. Following the delay to Brexit and the flexible extension to 31 October 2019, the Council had been instructed to prepare for the European Elections on 23 May, with any cost incurred being reimbursed if the election did not go ahead.

- 4.3 The Chief Executive confirmed that an appointment had been made for the Director of Housing, who would take overall responsibility for the newly created housing services function in the Council. Senior posts in CityWest Homes covering areas such as Human Resources, Finance and Communications which already existed in the City Council would not need to be replaced, and would be assimilated by Westminster's existing Directors. One of the new Director of Housing's key roles would be to review the structure of the housing service to ensure that the current arrangements were effective. The Chief Executive agreed that an initial area of focus should be the re-introduction of ground staff.
- 4.4 The Commission highlighted the need for clarity in providing contact details for inquiries relating to issues such as major works, and commented on the recently adopted system where tenants were sent bills in their April statements for works that had not been fully costed. Although the bills were being sent out in good intention, the discussion on the project may have taken place six months earlier, with residents not knowing who to contact in the housing service following the transition. The Chief Executive confirmed that this would be revisited, and that bills would provide more detail. Members also highlighted the need for consistency in the schedule of visits to estates, and the Chief Executive confirmed that the arrangements for visits would be reviewed as part of the improvement process.
- 4.5 The Commission discussed the funding strategy for the Oxford Street District, together with the approach to carrying out repairs and upgrades in view of planned major schemes. Members noted that some of the paving stones in Oxford Street were being replaced as they had become unsafe. The Chief Executive confirmed that it had always been intended to carry out the works in two phases, with the first phase being the most urgent remedial works which included the paving. A list of long-standing defects had been made and a sum of money allocated from the Highways Capital Programme to address the most urgent issues, avoiding carrying out works which would be dug up as part of the major scheme. The Cabinet report on Oxford Street had provided for the creation of a funding strategy as part of the next phase, which would be looking to secure funding from the private sector. The Commission noted that Crossrail still had no defined opening date.
- 4.6 Members highlighted that the need continued for pedicabs to be regulated. The Chief Executive confirmed there was an acceptance that there would need to be more focus on the responsibility for enforcement, as well as maintenance, once the Oxford Street area had been transformed. The City Council would also consider changing some of its policies, and would be consulting on busking and street entertainment. The Chief Executive acknowledged that Westminster's powers of enforcement were limited, and confirmed that the Council would continue to lobby central government for a change in legislation.

- 4.7 The Chief Executive reported that work on fair funding and the spending review was ongoing, and that discussions were taking place with the Department of Housing, Communities & Local Government and Treasury. It was anticipated that the budget envelope for the next three years would not be known before the end of the calendar year. In the meantime, the Chief Executive would continue to work with the Cabinet to determine what the future of the organisation might look like in delivering the priorities under City for All.
- 4.8 The Commission commented on the recent climate change protests that had taken place in Westminster. The Chief Executive confirmed that he had discussed the disruption with the Cabinet Member for Public Protection & Licensing, and had been in constant communication with residents, Ward Members and businesses to ensure that any impact they were experiencing was passed on to the police. The Chief Executive believed that the City Council had done all that it could, as the police were responsible for any enforcement that needed to be taken in response to the protests. Members noted that while very few residents had contacted the City Council, impact statements had been received from businesses.
- 4.9 In view of the disruption caused by the climate protests, the Commission asked the Chief Executive whether similar action could be taken in connection with the proposed state visit by President Trump in June 2020, and whether support could be obtained from London Councils. The Chief Executive confirmed that preliminary discussions with the most senior Police Officer responsible for the Trump visit had taken place, and that more detail of the itinerary would be known nearer June 2020. It was anticipated that the visit would have a greater impact than the previous visit in 2018, and that the police would be much more forceful in removing people from the street if protesters used similar tactics to the climate change activists.
- 4.10 Members commented on the ongoing asset degradation of **some of** the bridges that served Westminster, and highlighted concerns that the level of disrepair could lead to closures. There was particular concern for those that were not the responsibility of the Council. In particular there was concern for those bridges that were the responsibility of Network Rail. They did not appear to accept their responsibility for the bridges, and had not provided funding for maintenance as they considered that the bridges were safe and did not need any repairs. The Commission agreed that upward pressure was needed, as the bridges did not look structurally sound and it would only be a matter of time before they were closed. Members also agreed Network Rail should be asked to provide engineering reports that demonstrated their bridges were safe.
- 4.11 The Commission sought clarification of the action being taken by the City Council to address the pay gap with black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) staff. The Chief Executive acknowledged that the gender and BAME pay gaps and level of representation in middle and senior management were unacceptable, and confirmed that action was being taken to deal with the problem. Programmes of work put in place to address this shortfall included ensuring diversity on job interview panels; reverse mentoring; and talent monitoring as staff progressed through the organisation. It was recognised that in addition to good business reasons, there was an overwhelming and overriding moral responsibility for the problem to be addressed. Members noted that Westminster had been one of the

few organisations to have published details of its pay gap, which had not been a requirement.

- 4.12 The Chief Executive also confirmed that the City Council continued to work with the NHS towards integration; and was taking part in ongoing discussions with Clinical Commissioning Groups on funding reductions that could impact on Westminster's residents.
- 4.13 The Commission commended the successful transition from BT Managed Services to the Hampshire Integrated Business Centre, which had achieved 99.9% accuracy on payroll.

5 OUR VOICE STAFF ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

- 5.1 The Commission received a summary of the results of the 'Our Voice' survey 2018 from Lee Witham (Director of People Services) and Aruj Haider (Head of Organisational Development). Members noted that staff engagement had been 70%, which had been an increase of 4% from the previous year and the highest score that had ever been achieved. The result was also 4% above the local government average. The Director of People Services commented that the survey had not sought to measure staff satisfaction, but how engaged staff were in delivering their work and in endorsing the direction of the Council. The survey illustrated a moment in time which could highlight behavior which was good or needed to change. Although 30% of staff had not engaged in the survey, it was difficult to compel staff to take part, and 70% was considered to be a good response.
- 5.2 Although the findings on gender and ethnicity pay gaps were important, it had been clear from the survey that there had not been any gender or ethnicity difference in employee engagement. This had been a key element of Westminster being an 'employer of choice' for everyone in the organisation, regardless of background.
- 5.3 Aspects of the survey that had shown the biggest increase since 2017 had included staff believing that their work helped deliver City for All and was important to the organisation, residents and the community (+10%); recommending the Council as great place to work (+8%); and having belief and confidence that action would be taken on the findings of the survey (+8%). In addition to issues around diversity and inclusion, elements with the biggest decrease that needed to be focused on included staff believing they had the equipment and resources needed to do their job (-7%); that the physical working environment allowed them to deliver their work (-5%); and that they were satisfied with their overall benefits package (-3%).
- 5.4 Although diversity and inclusion were areas that still needed to improve, concerns regarding the working environment had reduced following the refurbishment of City Hall. Problems in payroll that would have contributed to staff becoming disengaged would also have reduced through the recent transfer of managed services. CityWest Homes had not provided data for the 2018 survey, as it had been carried out before the transition to an in-house service. The Commission noted that the pay gap issues at CityWest Homes had been worse than those at Westminster.

- 5.5 The Commission discussed staff engagement, and noted that the increased visibility and accessibility of senior managers had made a positive impact. Further improvement had also been gained from investment in the staff conference; and by creating disability, BAME and women's networks that enabled staff to challenge the organisation. It was acknowledged that to further improve, the City Council would need to continue to focus on local action and programmes that increased staff involvement.
- 5.6 The Chief Executive commented that although 28% of staff were BME, this figure dropped into single figures when looking at middle and senior management, which emphasised the importance of employees being able to move through the organisation. The City Council's approach to performance management had been radically changed, and was now more focused on staff development and how staff could grow. Westminster was also seeking to be progressive, with the new maternity policy for staff being one of the best in the country.
- 5.7 The Commission discussed recruitment and staff retention, and the Chief Executive highlighted the need to change employment agents' perception of the type of person Westminster wanted to recruit. Staff turnover across the country was rising in line with falling unemployment, with the cross-London average being 15%. Although Westminster's figure for staff turnover was slightly above this, the City Council was above average in retaining senior staff and leaders. Members suggested that the workplace had changed, and that people no longer planned to stay in a job for 25 years. The Chief Executive agreed that the organisation should not be concerned that staff came to Westminster to gain experience; and accepted that the Council exported talent, as good people were already employed and the jobs that would retain them were not available. The Chief Executive similarly considered that it was not a bad thing if someone left the City Council, and then returned with experience from another organisation.
- 5.8 The Commission highlighted the value of staging 'pulse surveys' at other times during the year, that could focus on specific issues and departments and identify problems that could be addressed quickly. The Director of People Services confirmed that similar surveys had been carried out when staff moved to Portland House and the Strand.
- 5.9 The Commission also discussed how services could be improved by obtaining information from contractors.

6. 2019-20 WORK PROGRAMME

- 6.1 The Commission discussed its future Work Programme, and noted that the agenda for the next meeting on 27 June would include an update from the Leader of the City Council and question and answer session.
- 6.2 The Commission asked to receive a report on Westminster's lobbying agenda and how the Council engaged with London Councils and the Local Government Association. Members highlighted the value of attending the Local Government Association Conference to share best practice, and the Chief Executive acknowledged the need for Westminster to become a more outward looking organisation.

6.3 The Commission also discussed bringing the start-time of future meetings forward to 6.30pm.

6.4 **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) The next meeting on 27 June 2019 would focus on a question and answer session with the Leader of the City Council, and on a report that considers Westminster's lobbying agenda and relationship with outside bodies; and
- (2) Consideration would be given to future meetings starting at 6.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.10pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____