

# Scrutiny Annual Report May 2018 - November 19

## Foreword

Scrutiny plays a vital role at Westminster City Council. It enables us as Councillors to hold decision makers, both within the Council and outside the Council, to account. Scrutiny also contributes to the development and review of new policies. Through these processes we often hear from residents and experts who are able to contribute their own local knowledge and expertise. City for All, the Council's overarching vision shapes so much of what we do at Westminster. Scrutiny's work helps to realise this vision, by ensuring that decisions, new policies, and services are made and operate in a way that makes Westminster a city where people can live in a healthy and safe environment, build fantastic careers in world-leading industries, have access to high quality affordable homes, and retire into their community with dignity and pride.

I wish to thank all my Scrutiny colleagues for their continued efforts in this vital work. 2018/19 was a busy but successful year for scrutiny at Westminster. This report covers just a selection of highlights from the year. It demonstrates the breadth of topics and issues that scrutiny has examined and provided recommendations on. In particular a number of Scrutiny Task Groups presented their findings and recommendations to the council. I myself chaired the Access to Culture Task Group. This began initially with the aim of just making recommendations to help low income families but was ultimately widened, so as to include how the Council could improve access to the arts and culture for all Westminster's residents.

Going forward, Scrutiny will be more important than ever. COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges for our city. Responding to and recovering from the effects of COVID-19 will require innovation and new ideas. As members of Scrutiny we will endeavour ensure the Council's recovery plan and policies are robust and in the best interest of our residents.

## How does Scrutiny work at Westminster?

Scrutiny is vital in promoting local accountability as it allows frontline Councillors (non-executive, backbench) to hold the Council's Cabinet Members (executive) to account. Importantly, other partners that provide services within the City, such as the NHS and Police, are also subject to scrutiny, so the process acts as an important tool for frontline Councillors to champion the interests of residents. In Westminster, the Scrutiny Committees and the Commission not only examine the work of the Council and monitor performance; they also actively contribute to developing policy by conducting research and making recommendations on how services can be improved. They serve to shine a light on and bring transparency to services and decisions by bringing the evidence into a public arena and giving frontline Councillors a chance to question and inform services. This is why in Westminster it is called Policy and Scrutiny, instead of overview and scrutiny, which is what you may hear it called in other places.

To develop policy and examine specific issues in more depth, committees typically establish Councillor-led task groups. Over the last year the Scrutiny Committees commissioned a number of task groups. One such task group was the Inclusion in Evening and Night Time Economy Task Group. As part of this work, Councillors will often hear from expert witnesses, question key officers and Cabinet Members, consult with relevant stakeholders and conduct site visits. Findings are then fed back to committees and conclusions presented to the Cabinet Member or partner for action. An individual member can also examine an issue in detail on behalf of the committee, this is called a Single Member Study (SMS).

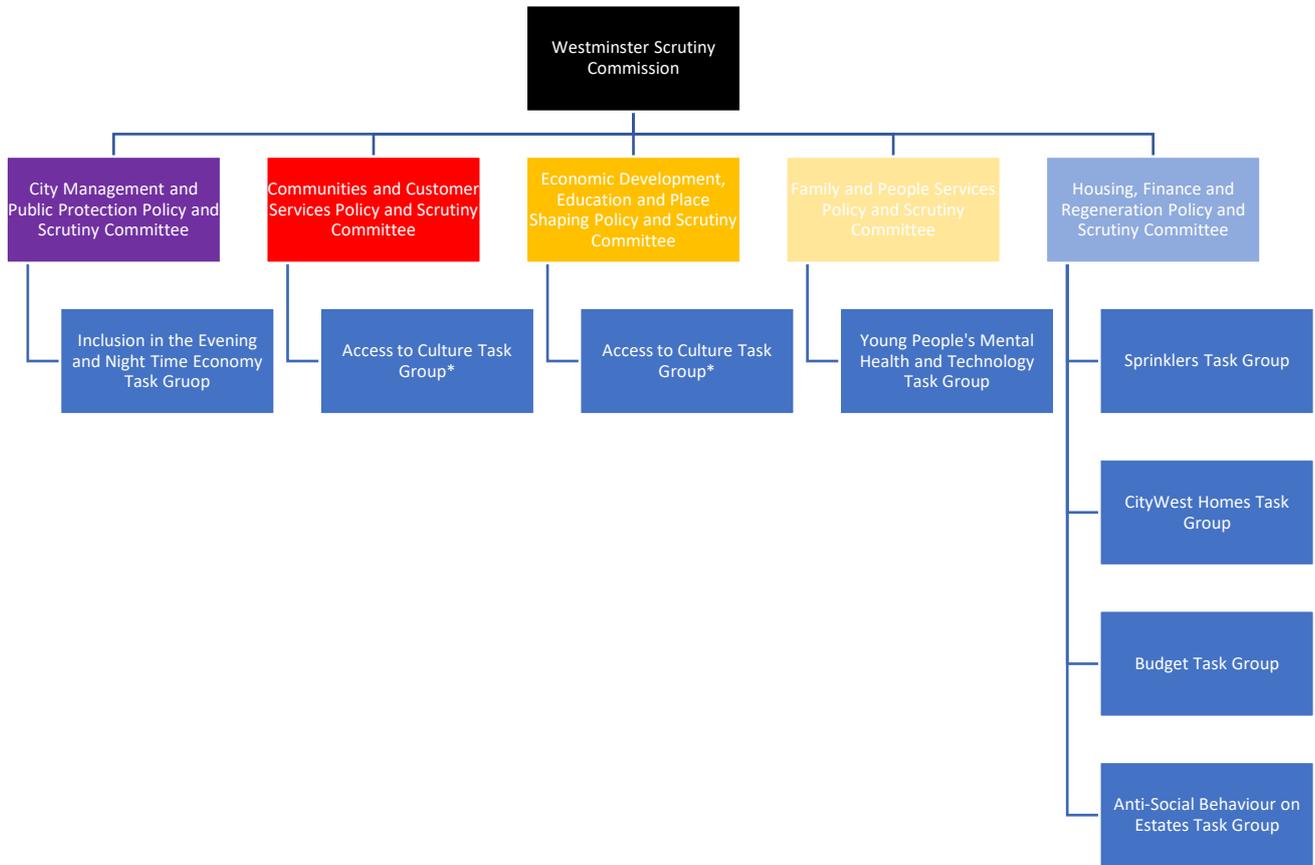
The work programmes for the Policy and Scrutiny Committees are typically developed at the start of the municipal year but items can be added at any time if important issues arise. To find out more, please visit the page for the relevant committee to find upcoming meeting dates and agendas. If you have a suggestion for a topic that you think could benefit from being scrutinised, please contact [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk)

### Attending policy and scrutiny meetings

Members of the public are welcome to attend Policy and Scrutiny Committee meetings. Meetings are usually held in City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1, 18<sup>th</sup> Floor, unless otherwise stated. Task Group meetings are open to the public at the discretion of the Chairman.

If you would like to attend a Policy and Scrutiny meeting, or you have any questions, please feel free to contact the team at [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk) or telephone 020 7641 2894.

# Westminster City Council Policy and Scrutiny Structure<sup>1</sup>



\*The Access to Culture Task Group was Commissioned by the Economic Development, Education and Place Shaping Policy and Scrutiny Committee. Following changes to Cabinet member portfolios in January 2019 responsibility for this area passed to the Communities and Customer Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee to which the task group reported.

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<sup>1</sup> As of November 2019

## Westminster Scrutiny Commission

### What does the Commission do?

The Westminster Scrutiny Commission is the overarching body which is responsible for the management and co-ordination of the council's Policy and Scrutiny function. The Members are the Chairmen of the respective Committees, alongside minority group representatives.

The commission has a number of important roles in the operation of the council. It is responsible for:

- scrutinising the Leader and the Chief Executive of the council in person
- the work programmes of all Policy and Scrutiny Committees
- scrutinising the Leader's portfolio and crosscutting council programmes, including but not limited to Strategy and Communications, Government Relations activity, Growth, Performance, the West End Partnership, Equalities, the council's Pay Policy and the Royal Parks Board.

### Highlights from the year

The Scrutiny Commission has met four times since May 2018. The commission focused on receiving updates from the Leader of the council on matters within her portfolio and from the Chief Executive who provided updates on matters of corporate interest. The Leader's updates have included topics such as the fair funding review, inclusion and diversity, the council's new parental leave policy and our support for EU nationals.

The Chief Executive has provided an update twice to the commission. These updates have covered, the CityWest Homes Review, the development of Oxford Street, the planning service review and moving from tri-borough services to bi-borough services.

In December 2018 the commission received a report on Emergency Preparedness in Westminster. The commission has adopted this as an annual report since 2017 and the events of Grenfell Tower and the Westminster Bridge Attack. The report covered emergency planning and business continuity, the standardisation of emergency response capabilities in London and the role of elected members in emergency preparedness.

In April 2019 the commission looked at the annual 'our voice' staff engagement survey. The commission discussed recruitment and staff retention, the positive effect on staff engagement of more visible managers and the BAME and gender pay gaps. We were pleased to see action in all these areas but acknowledged more still needs to be done.

In June 2019 the commission discussed the council's engagement with our partners. The reported highlighted key relationships necessary to deliver *City for All*, some of the benefits and challenges of effective partnership working, and how the council is attempting to mitigate some of those challenges.

# City Management and Public Protection Policy and Scrutiny Committee

## What does the committee do?

The committee examines work that falls under the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Environment and City Management, and the Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Licensing. The committee also has a role in holding to account a number of external organisations such as the Metropolitan Police Service, Park Authorities, and Transport for London.

Key programmes and areas of policy that the committee looks at are: utilities; community safety; roads and highway maintenance; transportation policy; and parking policy and enforcement.

## Highlights from the year

The committee heard about a proposal by the City Council to introduce a **Street Entertainment Policy in Westminster**. Street entertainment—known commonly as busking—includes music, dance, street theatre, comedy, performance, and art offered live in public spaces. The committee heard that the council valued the dynamic artistry, cultural contribution, and diversity that street entertainment brings to Westminster, but had also received a large number of complaints about street performers. The committee discussed the policy proposal with people from the street entertainment industry as well as local businesses and welcomed their expert comments and feedback.

The committee received a report outlining the council's multi-agency response to tackling **knife crime**. This includes the Westminster Knife Crime Action Plan; activity taken by the Serious Youth Violence Task Group; the new public health approach; the work of the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit; and the Youth Offending Team. The committee heard that that violence is a multi-agency priority going forward and as such all agencies are accountable in combating knife crime. The committee discussed knife crime in the context of serious youth violence. As part of its consideration of this issue the committee heard from Julia Mayer from the Westminster-based youth charity Redthread. The committee heard about Redthread's work at St Mary's Hospital where its service was embedded in the hospital. It provides intense support to young people at the earliest opportunity and then continued to support to the young person after they leave the hospital.

The **Inclusion in the Evening and Night Time Economy Task Group** launched its report in October 2019. The task group was established to investigate people's experiences on inclusion within the Evening and Night Time Economy, identify any barriers to inclusion, and make recommendations on how those barriers could be overcome. The task group's recommendations focused on three areas: best practice; legislation; and training.

## Communities and Customer Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### **What does the committee do?**

The committee examines work that falls under the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Sports, Culture and Community and the Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Digital.

Key programmes and areas of policy that the committee looks at are: customer services; the digital strategy; broadband; Active Westminster; culture; libraries and the voluntary and community sector.

### **Highlights from the year**

In June 2019 the Independent Libraries Advisory Board published their report and recommendations. The committee invited Chris Cotton (Chair, Westminster Libraries Advisory Board) to present the report and we discussed the board's recommendations. We welcomed all of the recommendations set out in the report, and suggested more detail was provided on access for people with disabilities. We also invited representatives of the Ideas Store in Tower Hamlets to the meeting to discuss different models of delivering library services.

The committee also reviewed a report on Moberly Sports Centre's first year. 2018-2019 was a very successful year for the new Sports Centre. Over the first 10 months since opening, Moberly had significantly surpassed its usage targets with a total number of 444,000 visits. Twenty-nine clubs currently used the Centre on a regular basis; and the City Council had formed close partnerships with local schools who were actively using the new facility.

The Access to Culture Task Group launched its report in November 2019. The task group was originally established by the Economic Development, Education, Community and Place Shaping Committee. However, as the community portfolio moved to this committee, the task group provided its report to us. The task group investigated how cultural engagement can provide emotionally and intellectually moving experiences, and is also a means of acquiring skills, expressing creativity, forging an individual identity, and enhancing or preserving a community's sense of place. The task group's recommendations focus on:

- increasing cultural capital for young people in Westminster;
- integrating services; and
- establishing a cultural budget.

## Economic Development, Education and Place Shaping Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### What does the committee do?

The committee examines work which falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Education and Skills and the Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning. The committee's remit includes scrutinising education programmes and policies. Given this, the committee membership must also include:

- a Church of England diocese representative;
- a Roman Catholic diocese representative;
- two parent governor representatives; and
- two headteachers from local schools or academies.

### Highlights from the year

The committee was presented with a report on the council's **Draft City Plan** which provided information on how the policies in the plan aimed to support and encourage Westminster's continued economic growth and provide opportunities in line with the council's City for All priorities. The committee heard from people with an interest in economic growth in Westminster. The discussion included the importance of policies that recognise the need for high quality digital infrastructure for modern businesses and the use of technology in driving economic growth and the importance of making young people aware of career opportunities through schools, colleges, career days and employment hubs.

The committee received an update on **school exclusions** in Westminster. The report provided comparisons between the number of school exclusions in Westminster against national and London benchmarks. The committee heard that the number of secondary school children being excluded had increased and was above the national average, but the number in primary schools had decreased and was below the national average. The Committee discussed this with stakeholders from the education sector. The committee made several comments on this issue, including that the City Council should continue to evaluate the reasons behind school exclusions in Westminster and how it could provide quick access to vital services that could prevent vulnerable young people being permanently excluded from school.

The committee considered the strategic review of the **Westminster Adult Education Service** (WAES). The committee heard from a number of witnesses, including students at WAES. The review highlighted the excellent reputation WAES has both locally and across London. The committee noted the diverse range of education and training opportunities available at WAES.

In October 2018, the committee established the Access to Culture Task Group to investigate access to culture. The objectives of this group included making recommendations aimed at improving access to the arts and culture for Westminster's residents. The group also wanted to explore how improved access to culture could result in improved skills and employment prospects, particularly as this aligns with City for All ambitions. The Task Group met with internal and external groups to inform its work. These groups included Cultural Partnerships; Community Services; Physical Activity, Leisure and Sport; the Libraries Service; Cambridge City Council; Bracknell Forest; Queen's Park

Primary School; Westminster City Lions; Westminster Youth Council (WYC); Rolls-Royce; and SmartCitizen<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> In early 2019 the community portfolio moved to the newly established Communities and Customer Services Committee. This meant that the Task Group's final report and recommendations went to that committee.

## Family and People Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### What does the committee do?

The Family and People Services Committee scrutinises the broad range of policies and programmes that make up the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Family Services and Public Health. This involves looking at the way the health service interacts jointly with social care services, the voluntary sector, independent providers and other council services to provide better health services to meet the diverse needs of Westminster residents and improve their wellbeing.

This committee is also Westminster's statutory health scrutiny committee and looks at the work of the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and NHS provider trusts including Imperial, Chelsea and Westminster, Central London Community Healthcare and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.

### Highlights from the year

The committee also considered a report on **child obesity**. Preventing childhood obesity is a key priority in Westminster. Obesity is associated with multiple adverse health outcomes and significant costs to the NHS and wider economy. In 2015, Public Health introduced a focused programme of work that aimed to halt and reverse levels of childhood obesity across Westminster in partnership with the NHS and wider Council. This involved the commissioning of new prevention and treatment services and cross-council action to create healthier local environments. The committee heard that as a result of these collective efforts, rates of childhood obesity were starting to reduce locally.

The committee received a report on **sexual and reproductive health** services in Westminster. The committee heard about how the services were being developed as well as the challenges facing the City Council and providers. The discussion included an update on the use of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)—a medication used to prevent people developing HIV. The committee commented that the City Council should investigate whether the treatment could be offered free by the NHS to high risk people who could not afford it. If this was not possible, the committee said the City Council could investigate ways of helping support a hardship fund.

The committee received a report on **immunisation programmes in Westminster**. The report was presented by NHS England, who have responsibility for coordinating the national immunisations programme and ensuring local providers of services deliver against national service specifications and meet agreed population uptake cover. The data in the report indicated that uptake of most vaccines in Westminster was lower than the national average. The committee were concerned about this and discussed the challenges with representatives from NHS England, Public Health, and the CCGs. The committee made a number of recommendations aimed at improving uptake of immunisations.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) completed its review of **Soho Square General Practice** in May of 2018. The review was in part prompted by issues that were brought up at a meeting of this committee's predecessor—the Adults and Health Policy and Scrutiny Committee. The CQC rated the practice as inadequate overall. In December 2018, the committee invited LivingCare, the company that operated the practice, to respond to the findings of the review. LivingCare provided a presentation to the committee on the concerns raised by the CQC and the work undertaken to address these concerns including the appointment of a Lead GP, improved patient access and the strengthening of relationships with key stakeholders.

## Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### What does the committee do?

The Housing, Finance and Regeneration Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services. Some of the key policy areas the committee covers are: housing management; housing regeneration; homelessness; corporate property; finance and resources.

### Highlights from the year

The highlights for the 2018/19 year include the task groups that have reported back to the committee. The **Budget and Performance Task Group** made its annual report in January 2019. This Task Group scrutinises the council's budget setting process. Membership of this group is taken from across all Policy and Scrutiny Committees. In recent years, the task group has taken a greater interest in the capital budget as it is responsible for delivering a large part of City for All.

The **Sprinklers Task Group** reported back to the committee in September 2018. After the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy on 14 June 2017, the City Council made an informal commitment to retrofit tall buildings with sprinkler systems. The task group was set up to consider the practical and legal implications of this. After the local elections in 2018, our committee decided to continue the task group's work. The task group's work included exploring the advantages and disadvantages of retrofitting buildings with sprinklers and reviewing the options available for fitting sprinklers. This work culminated in a number of recommendations that related to sprinklers and fire doors.

In June 2018 the committee established a task group to review **CityWest Homes**, the council's arm's length housing management organisation. Through its work the task group was made aware of a number of structural issues with CityWest Homes. The task group made recommendations that focused on three areas: strategic priorities; customer services; and major works. In January 2019 the Cabinet Member for Housing Services responded to the task group's recommendations which included notification of the Council's intention to move the service back in-house. Housing management continues to be a key priority for the committee and we receive regular reports on the performance of the service.

The committee also established a Task Group to investigate Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) on Estates after the housing management services were bought in house. The task group was established to investigate ASB on council-managed housing estates and how that was being managed and to review how the housing ASB team is performing and integrating with other parts of this council. The task group reported back to the committee in November 2019. It made recommendations that focus on three main areas: better communication and guidance for residents; use of the council's legal powers; and supporting vulnerable residents.

## Thanks and Further Information

The Committee Chairmen wish to thank

- all the councillors involved in the Policy and Scrutiny Committees and task groups
- the Cabinet members for their ongoing support and appearances at the committees
- all the independent witnesses who give their time and expertise; and
- the officers who prepare and present the reports

If you would like more information about how scrutiny works at Westminster or wish to make a suggestion about areas that one of the committees may wish to scrutinise, please contact us at [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk) or by calling us on 020 7641 2894.

You can also view our scrutiny pages on our website [www.westminster.gov.uk/policy-and-scrutiny](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/policy-and-scrutiny)