



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held virtually on **Wednesday 19th May 2021 at 6.30pm**, via Microsoft TEAMS.

Members Present: Councillors Gotz Mohindra (Chairman), Susie Burbridge, Lorraine Dean, Paul Dimoldenberg, Richard Elcho, Adam Hug, Pancho Lewis, and Emily Payne.

Also Present: Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Cabinet Member for City Management), Councillor Paul Swaddle (Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City), Daniela Brown (Diary & Office Manager, LMO), Elad Eisenstein (Programme Director Oxford Street District), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning and Housing), and Artemis Kassi (Lead Scrutiny Advisor).

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 Councillor Murad Gassanly had been replaced on the Committee by Councillor Danny Chalkley.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Danny Chalkley. Councillor Richard Elcho substituted for Councillor Chalkley.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 2021 be approved as a correct record of proceedings, subject to the amendment of clause 6.2 to read both “officers” and “offices”.

ACTION: Minutes of 24th March 2021 to be amended at paragraph 6.2.

4 UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND SMART CITY

4.1 The Committee received a written update from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City, Councillor Paul Swaddle, who responded to members' questions on matters of interest in his portfolio, which included the following topics:

- the reopening of the City not only to residents but also to wider communities and tourists;
- the programme of activation and relationship with cultural institutions, including pop-ups;
- homeschooling, the end of free broadband schemes on 31st August, the numbers of families in the City eligible for free broadband and the challenge of digital exclusion;
- the Agilisys service and its performance;
- the Animation Strategy;
- the Smart City programme, including the call to the public for ideas around improvements; and
- accessibility for users with disabilities, the Covid-19 context and social distancing.

4.2 The Committee discussed the reopening of the City. The Committee heard that it was planned that events such as West End Live would take place later in the year and that Councillor Swaddle would separately arrange detailed briefings regarding activations. The Committee also discussed in depth the importance of issues around: BIDs and who attended meetings with the BIDs; clarification around the Vital Energy contract, the decarbonisation of buildings and the decarbonisation programme more generally; pop-up locations and timings around these pop ups including plans to extend; the Animation Strategy and engagement with cultural institutions; the impact of Covid on business rates; and the uptake of free broadband by school pupils in Westminster.

4.3 The Committee heard that 80% of Westminster's social housing now had full fibre connection with the aim of reaching 100% by year end. The Committee also heard that the contact centre performance had not been satisfactory in April and continued to be monitored.

5 UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CITY MANAGEMENT

5.1 The Committee received a written update from the Cabinet Member for City Management, Councillor Melvyn Caplan, who responded to members' questions on matters of interest in his portfolio, which included the following topics:

- the usage of Paddington Recreation Ground;
- the reopening of all leisure centres and gyms in the wider context of the future of the leisure industry;
- the charging points for Electric Vehicles and parking pressures in the City;

- the delivery of the Council's capital programme; and
 - the increase in covers as part of al fresco dining in Westminster.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed in depth the importance of issues concerning: the shopping areas outside of Oxford Street; disability access in particular around the Soho area; maintaining full opening hours for leisure centres and the future for leisure centres versus outside spaces; revenue from the al fresco dining scheme; and public restroom facilities and mobile urinals.

6. REPORT ON THE OXFORD STREET DISTRICT

- 6.1 The Committee received a report on the Oxford Street District from Elad Eisenstein (Programme Director, Oxford Street District) who introduced the work taking place to improve this area. The Committee heard that delivery had been successful and that the framework had been launched with partners, with Elad Eisenstein highlighting the impact of online retail going forward and the need to create experiences for visitors to the district. The Committee also heard that work was being done in both the form of district-wide interventions as well as local practical solutions to ensure the district was fully integrated. Elad Eisenstein highlighted for the Committee the work taking place around vacant properties and spaces which were being under-utilised. The Committee discussed the need for improved green spaces and decarbonisation.
- 6.2 The Committee heard about the improvements within the Oxford Street District and how these linked into the economy across the West End as a whole from Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning and Housing). Debbie Jackson emphasised the importance of a thriving economy and long-term economic success and explained that this ongoing project was collaborative, with input from colleagues across the Council.
- 6.3 Noting the report, the Committee discussed the balance between the need for detail to enable scrutiny and receiving papers of reasonable brevity. The Committee also discussed the benchmarks used in the Oxford Street District work, including Barcelona.
- 6.4 The Committee discussed the Oxford Street District in depth. The key themes that emerged from the Committee's discussion were:
- the greening of the Oxford Street District, including tree-planting and maintenance;
 - the future of work and retail, including the maintenance of active retail frontages and changes from retail to office space;
 - zero carbon targets and aims;
 - the investment being made in the West End and workforce analytics;
 - the issues concerning retail rents and flexibility in business rates;
 - the Marble Arch Mound, long term plans and continued engagement; and
 - the importance of working with BIDs, landowners, businesses and amenity societies.

- 6.5 The Committee discussed projects such as the London Eye, which had been conceived as a temporary structure which had become permanent. The Committee was advised that, although the Marble Arch Mound would be a temporary project, there were other long-term projects in the pipeline. In addition, the Committee was informed that work was being done to increase engagement with local businesses through communication channels.
- 6.6 The Committee discussed the greening measures being taken and heard that the emissions targets, although steep, were being worked towards via a suite of plans including a retrofit project for buildings.
- 6.7 The Committee was advised that the shift from retail to office space on Oxford Street had been in place for some time, and that this was not a new trend in retail. The Committee heard that the ambitions were for the Oxford Street District to focus on the experiential, offering experiences to visitors to move away from purely being a retail destination. Officers advised that experiential retail had become key and there had been a shift away from the flagship stores which were once central to the Oxford Street experience. With regards to social media, the Committee heard that there had been a focus on smart programmes and virtual reality experiences to ensure Oxford Street continued to be seen as a destination.
- 6.8 The Committee heard that work had been and continued to be done with landowners with regards to flexibility around rents and pop-up spaces, and that whilst the larger buildings in this area would be utilised fairly quickly, there was a focus on small and medium units which would be more difficult to fill. Debbie Jackson advised the Committee that an intelligence pack of metric was being gathered and the Committee heard that building data and metrics were being analysed as part of an ongoing project.
- 6.9 The Committee also heard that the Council had used insight from international city projects to inform the Oxford Street District project and other Council projects. Elad Eisenstein highlighted for the Committee how Barcelona was used as an example of a city where, although many planning restrictions were in place, in particular in the historic areas, the authorities in Barcelona had been able to find innovative solutions to issues such as waste management and transportation.
- 6.10 The Committee acknowledged the work involved in delivering the plans for the Oxford Street District and requested to be kept informed.

ACTION: Officers to confirm numbers related to tree planting (Elad Eisenstein).

7. WORK PROGRAMME

- 7.1 The Committee discussed its work programme for the next municipal year and considered reviewing procurement, recycling and waste and post pandemic measures at future meetings. The Committee confirmed that, at its next meeting, the main agenda item would be a report on procurement.

7.2 The Committee was advised that the next meeting of the Committee had been re-scheduled from 2nd to 30th June.

7.3 **AOB** - None

8. TERMINATION OF MEETING

8.1 The meeting ended at 20:55

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____