



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

**FINANCE, SMART CITY AND CITY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE  
24<sup>th</sup> November 2021  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a hybrid meeting of the **Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held virtually on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at 6.30pm via Microsoft Teams and Rooms 18.01-03, 18<sup>th</sup> floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Gotz Mohindra (Chairman), Ian Adams, Lorraine Dean, Paul Dimoldenberg, Adam Hug, Matt Noble, Eoghain Murphy and Emily Payne.

**Also Present:** Councillor James Spencer (Cabinet Member), Councillor Paul Swaddle (Cabinet Member), Lewis Aaltonen (Policy and Scrutiny Co-ordinator), Gerald Almeroth (Executive Director for Finance and Resources), Elizabeth Gaden (E-Scooter Trial Stakeholder & Contracts Manager at Transport for London), Raj Mistry (Executive Director for Environment and City Management), Jonathan Rowing (Head of Parking Operations), Hannah Small (Policy and Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Giacomo Vecia (Senior Strategic Transport Officer at City of London Corporation).

## **1. MEMBERSHIP**

1.1 Councillor Pancho Lewis was unable to attend and sent apologies. Councillor Matt Noble substituted for Councillor Pancho Lewis.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

2.1 None received.

## **3. MINUTES**

3.1 The Chairman approved the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2021.

3.2 The Chairman approved the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

#### **4. CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND SMART CITY UPDATE**

- 4.1 The Committee received a written and short verbal update from Councillor Paul Swaddle (Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City) who provided an update on current and forthcoming priorities in his portfolio.
- 4.2 The Committee discussed the following topics in detail:
- The Council's budget and the funding gap;
  - The timeframe for income budget's to return to pre-pandemic levels;
  - The public affairs strategy for further local government funding;
  - The Council's financial reserves;
  - Forecast variances and the identification of risk and opportunities within the variances;
  - Active Westminster Card and available discounts for residents;
  - An ongoing innovation competition on how the Council can better use data; and
  - The KPI for council and business tax collection rates
- 4.3 The Committee asked the Cabinet Member extensively about the Council's budget and the funding gap. Senior Officers updated that they are examining each service to see if any there would be any underspend within the budgets.
- 4.4 Concerning the timeframe for income budgets to return to pre-pandemic levels, the Committee were informed that return of revenue varied by service and might take the entirety of the next financial year to return to pre-pandemic levels. For example, some income streams such as parking was at 90% of pre-pandemic revenue. Commercial waste, on the other-hand, was hardest hit during the pandemic and will take longer to return to pre-pandemic levels of revenue.
- 4.5 The Committee discussed the Public Affairs Strategy for further local government funding and the engagement the council is having with central government on this. Senior Officers said they had submitted into the spending review and the Leader of the Council was engaging with central government on business rates, for example.
- 4.6 Concerning the Council's reserves, the Committee were informed that the Council had £60 million in reserves. An average local authority should have 10% of their net budget in reserves, however Senior Officers recommend for Westminster having on average 30% of their net budget in reserves as Westminster is more vulnerable to economic shock.
- 4.7 The Committee discussed forecast variances. Senior Officers informed the Committee that forecast variances naturally reduce throughout the year as more information is accounted for.

- 4.8 Members of the Committee discussed the Active Westminster Card and the data which will allow discounted reasons to be hidden from view. This concept was building upon the recommendations made within Councillor Karen's Scarborough's Task Group on Access to Culture.
- 4.9 The Committee discussed the ongoing Council-led competition to encourage residents to share their ideas with the Council on how services can become more innovative. Members of the Committee proposed that the Council use data to ensure repair and transport works takes place at less busier times so as to not contribute further to traffic congestion.
- 4.10 Concerning council and business tax collection rates, the Committee were informed that the council were about 3% behind on a normal year and that the council broadly expected levels to return to pre-pandemic levels.

## **5. CABINET MEMBER FOR CITY MANAGEMENT**

- 5.1 The Committee received a written and short verbal update from Councillor James Spencer (Cabinet Member for City Management) who provided an update on current and forthcoming priorities in his portfolio as follows:
- The timeframe for commissioning temporary lavatories across the City;
  - The equal pavement pledge and the engagement the council is having with stake-holders;
  - The increased level of abuse faced by cleaning staff across the City;
  - The increased anti-social behaviour enforcement across the City; and
  - EV charging points and the extent to which this would encourage residents to switch to electric vehicles
- 5.2 The Committee asked if there were enough temporary lavatories in the city's hotspots (e.g. Soho). Senior Officers said the issue was related to poor/lack of signage and directions to temporary facilities. Some Members remained of the view that there were not enough lavatories, particularly for women, across the City.
- 5.3 The Committee were informed that the council had signed up to the equal pavement pledge. The council are engaging with local experts such as local Age UK groups and had also conducted a survey with Transport for All as well as an internal audit to assess accessibility across the City.
- 5.4 The Committee discussed the increased abuse towards street cleaners and were informed that a street cleaner had recently been hospitalised after an attack. The Committee put on record their thanks to the staff across the council that keep the City clean and presentable.

- 5.5 Members of the Committee welcomed the increased enforcement of anti-social behaviour across the City. It was noted that there was a substantial increase in fixed penalty notices, however this approach was very resource intensive and Members questioned if the Council had the capacity to maintain this level of enforcement.
- 5.6 Concerning the EV charging points across the City, the Committee asked if the council had any data to show the increased number of EV charging points is encouraging people to switch to electric cars. Senior Officers thought it was a number of factors that were encouraging people to purchase electric cars.
- 5.7 **ACTIONS:** The Committee requests that:
- It be provided with a breakdown of parking income by vehicle and permits per vehicle to assess the number of electric cars across Westminster.

## **6. REPORT ON INTERIM RESULTS FROM THE TFL E-SCOOTER TRIAL IN WESTMINSTER**

- 6.1 The Committee received a written and short verbal update from Raj Mistry (Executive Director for Environment and City Management) on the interim results of the TFL E-Scooter trial taking place across Westminster.
- 6.2 Elizabeth Gaden (E-Scooter Trial Stakeholder and Contracts Manager at TFL) and Giacomo Vecia (Senior Strategic Transport Officer at City for London Corporation) attended the Committee as expert witnesses.
- 6.3 The Committee discussed the following topics in detail:
- Safety requirements around electric scooters
  - The nuisance the scooters cause to residents
  - Whether it was tourists or residents using the scooters
  - How TFL and the council were tracking complaints
  - Whether the use of the scooters will encourage a model shift from cars
  - If the Scooters were individually identifiable and if licences were required
  - The correlation between increased journeys and injuries
- 6.4 Concerning safety requirements needed to rent a scooter, TFL informed the Committee that in order to rent a scooter a provisional driving licence was required. TFL informed the Committee that out of approximately 300,000 journeys, 9 serious injuries had been reported and that incident rates are not increasing in line with journeys suggesting the majority of journeys are safe. Members of the Committee asked whether helmets needed to become mandatory as there is a risk of head injury using these scooters.

- 6.5 Regarding the nuisance the scooters can cause to residents, TFL informed the Committee that individuals can be charged and/or fined for leaving scooters outside of designated bays or driving dangerously. TFL has a service level agreement with the providers to pick up scooters not left in designated bays within a certain timeframe.
- 6.6 The Committee discussed whether it was tourists or residents using the scooters and whether it was encouraging a switch to active transport if it was just tourists using the scooters.
- 6.7 The Committee were informed that TFL are capturing incidents through the complaints tracker and capturing complaints going to the operator. Members of the Committee questioned whether all incidents were being captured if relying on members of the public to complain to the operators. TFL informed the Committee that there is reliance on self-reporting across all rental equipment including Santander bikes.
- 6.8 Concerning encouraging a model shift from cars, the Committee felt they did not have access to the appropriate data to comment on whether the scooters were encouraging this. However, it was noted by some members that younger people who seemed to be using the scooters more, were setting positive behaviours by using active transport such as this.
- 6.9 It was noted that there were traffic orders in place to allow e-scooters to drive in cycle lanes and that it was illegal for more than one person to ride on an e-scooter. It was also noted that TFL were working to implement an acoustic signalling system into the trail for those with sight impairments.
- 6.10 The Committee discussed pavement parking and how the scooters were causing accessibility issues for disabled people on the pavement. It was noted by the independent witness that the City of London undertook an extensive equality impact assessment before the trial was rolled out across the City of London and disabled accessibility was examined as part of this.
- 6.11 **RESOLVED:** that the Committee note the report.

## **7. REPORT ON PARKING IN WESTMINSTER IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID19**

- 7.1 The Committee received a written report and short verbal update from Jonathan Rowing (Head of Parking Operations) on parking in Westminster in the context of Covid19.
- 7.2 The Committee discussed the following topics in detail:
- Enforcement and parking income

- How to ensure the level of parking income remains the same
- The safety of traffic enforcement officers
- If the increase in paid for parking is temporary
- Parking contracts and the relationship with the workforce

7.3 The Committee discussed the significant impact the pandemic had had on parking income, although finances were returning to pre-pandemic levels. The Committee also discussed the long-term future for parking income across the City due to the introduction of the ULEZ in October 2021.

7.4 The Committee heard that the Council was taking more robust enforcement measures and had defined several roads as traffic sensitive streets.

7.5 Concerning the level of parking income, Members of the Committee expressed their desire to ensure parking income remains constant as it pays for SEND transport across the City.

7.6 Concerning the safety of traffic enforcement officers, Members enquired if enforcement officers went out in pairs and whether risk assessments were routinely undertaken. The Committee were informed that Council was strongly considering the inclusion of body-cameras in the new contracts when they next go out for procurement.

7.7 The Committee were informed that there had been a significant uptake in pay to park parking. Members enquired if this was individuals returning to the City to work, people not willing to take public transport during the pandemic or tourists. The Committee recommended that Officers try to better understand this data.

7.8 The Committee discussed the need for the Council to better understand the socio-demographics of those parking in Westminster. The Committee were informed that only about 4% of parking across the City had resident permits. The Committee suggested that Officers also examine the duration of stays and vehicle type.

7.9 The Committee enquired whether Officers were confident whether industrial relations were getting better after previous threats of industrial action.

7.10 **ACTIONS:** The Committee requested that:

- The Committee to receive a briefing on the current occupancy levels for Q car parks across Westminster.

7.11 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee note the report.

## **8. WORK PROGRAMME**

- 8.1 The Committee discussed the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The Committee agreed to scrutinise Active Westminster Card at the next Committee.

## **9. END OF MEETING**

- 9.1 The Chairman formally closed the meeting at 9:04pm.

CHAIRMAN \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_