

# POLICY AND SCRUTINY

at Westminster  
City Council

Annual Report 2022



# Contents

<b>Foreword from the Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. How does Scrutiny work at Westminster? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.1 Beyond the Committee Meeting Cycle: Extraordinary Meetings, Task Groups, Single Member Studies.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2 Committee Work Programmes .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.3 Suggestions for Scrutiny Topics .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4 Attending Policy and Scrutiny Committee meetings .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Summaries of the work of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1 Westminster Scrutiny Commission .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.2 Adults and Public Health Policy and Scrutiny Committee.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3 Business and Children’s Policy and Scrutiny Committee .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.4 Communities, Regeneration &amp; Housing Policy and Scrutiny Committee.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.5 Finance, Smart City &amp; City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3. Acknowledgements and Further Information.....</b>	<b>24</b>

## Scrutiny Annual Report 2022



**Cllr Karen Scarborough  
Commission Chair**

### **Foreword from the Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

Since the establishment of the scrutiny function under the legislation of the Local Government Act 2000, scrutiny has played and continues to play a vital role at Westminster City Council. It amplifies the voice of residents and enables Councillors to hold to account the decision-makers within the Council, such as the Cabinet, the Executive Leadership Team and Council officers.

But the remit of scrutiny reaches beyond the geographic footprint of Westminster, so that we also hold to account those decision-makers outside Westminster City Council, such as the Chief Executives and Directors of Health Trusts and Utilities, for example. Westminster scrutiny also contributes to the development and review of new policies. Through these processes, we often hear from residents and experts who contribute their own local knowledge in addition to national and international expertise and experience.

As we strive for World-Class Westminster, the Council's overarching strategic vision, "City for All", shapes so much of what we do at Westminster, and this is true for Westminster scrutiny. In scrutiny, we see how the local is the global, whether we are investigating the effects of climate change in severe flooding in north Westminster or the impact of a global pandemic on Oxford Street, our international high street, so our scrutiny function contributes to achieving this world-class vision. We work to ensure that decisions, policies, and services are developed and operated in a way that makes Westminster a place where people can grow, develop and thrive in a healthy and safe environment, build fantastic careers in both local businesses and world-leading industries, have access to high quality, affordable homes, and retire into their community with dignity and pride.

As we approach the local elections in May 2022, we can reflect that the last four years (2018 – 2022) have been busy but successful years for scrutiny at Westminster, despite the many challenges. Whilst success can be captured in resident feedback, improved council services and robust decision-making, it can be difficult to measure the impact of scrutiny, especially where that impact is the work of building constructive relationships or brokering conversations.

As an example of the breadth of scrutiny's work, in 2018 I myself chaired the Access to Culture Task Group. This began initially with the aim of making recommendations to help low-income families and improve social capital outcomes for our younger residents. Our investigations revealed the greater potential for streamlining access to all the Council's services, so the scope of this scrutiny task group work was ultimately widened and our recommendations reflected this, with a main

recommendation for a single card which harnessed the benefits of this streamlining. Our research and work demonstrated how such a card can be tailored with offers for each individual resident, and act as a proof of age card, eligibility for housing, library card, local retailer offers, loyalty discounts, recycling or Green rewards, collecting skills for inclusion in a CV, tailored mailings and surveys, a health card, blood group and donor card, use for Adult Social Care services, sports and leisure membership, indeed multiple memberships, with possible 'Westminster' branding, real time integrations and endless possibilities. The recommendations also included how the Council could improve access to the arts and culture for all Westminster's residents. These scrutiny recommendations originated and now underpin the work being done by the Council's Smart City team to deliver a MyWestminster Digital Card.

This annual report encompasses the period from January 2021 to March 2022, again demonstrating the breadth of topics and issues that scrutiny can consider and examine, to provide recommendations to improve services for our residents.

In future, as Westminster emerges from the tumultuous two years of the global pandemic, Westminster scrutiny will be more important than ever. COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges for our City, whether at local or international levels, for our residents, local business community and for the global-brand businesses and industries which also call Westminster their home. Responding to and recovering from the effects of COVID-19 will require innovation and new ideas. As members of Scrutiny at Westminster, we shall endeavour to ensure that the Council's recovery plans and policies are robust and in the best interests of our residents.

As Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, I should also like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow scrutiny colleagues and our scrutiny officers for their work in addition to their commitment to the independence and effectiveness of scrutiny at Westminster.

**Councillor Karen Scarborough**

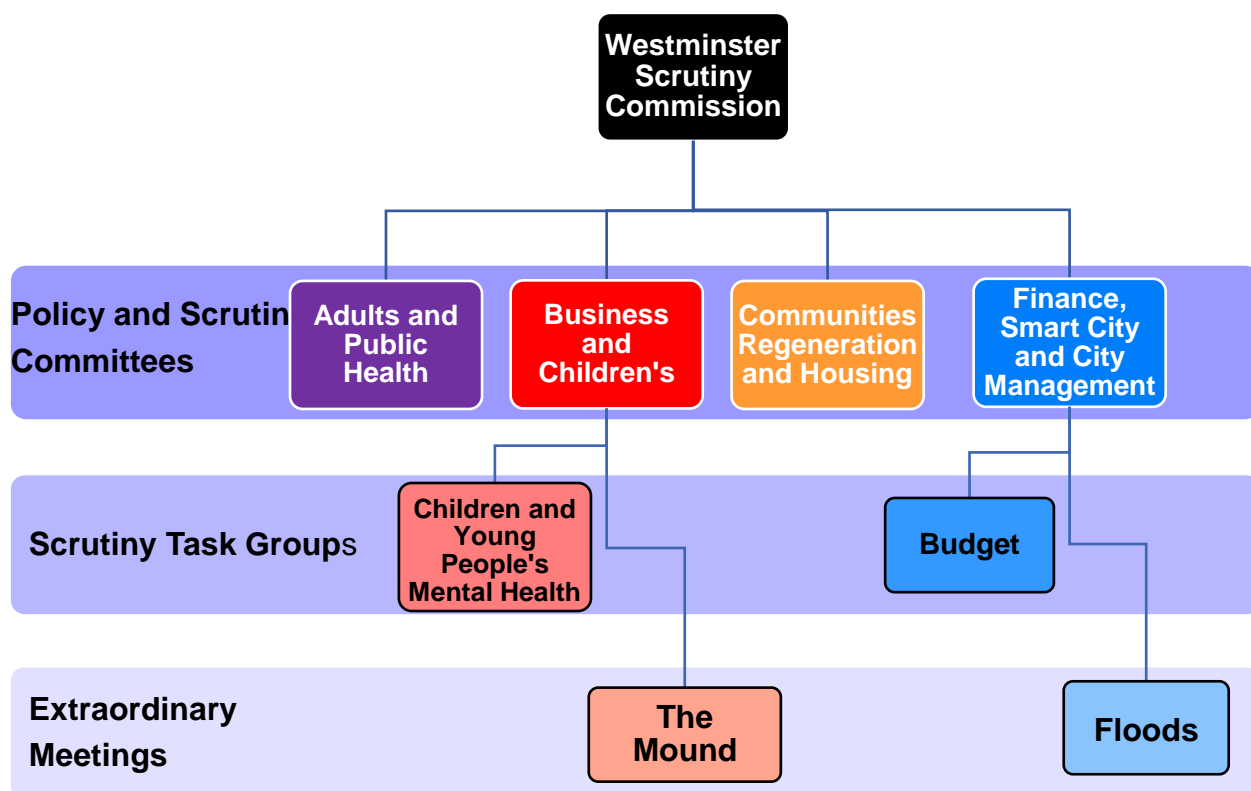
## 1. How does Scrutiny work at Westminster?

Scrutiny is vital in promoting transparency and local accountability as it allows Councillors (non-executive, backbench) to hold the Council's Cabinet Members (executive) to account. Scrutiny allows our residents to have a greater say in Council matters by scrutinising matters of local concern. This scrutiny leads to reports and recommendations which advise the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. Importantly, other external partners that provide services within the City, such as the NHS and the Metropolitan Police Service, also fall within the remit of our scrutiny committees, so the process acts as an important tool for our frontline Councillors to address the concerns and champion the interests of residents in relation to the public services they receive.

In Westminster, scrutiny is conducted by the overarching Westminster Scrutiny Commission and its four subordinate Policy and Scrutiny Committees (see **Figure 1**). These Policy and Scrutiny (P&S) Committees 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. By examining Westminster services against similar services elsewhere, regionally, nationally or internationally, the P&S Committees work to achieve benchmarking of and excellence in service delivery. They serve to shine a light on and bring transparency to the decisions taken by Cabinet Members and the way services are delivered. The issues which the P&S Committees choose to explore are evidence-based and will often include the insights of external experts and relevant community representatives or advocates. This approach ensures objective and supportive analysis of issues of concern or of plans in development to provide the Council with the reassurance that its policies are sound and that its services are meeting the needs of residents and businesses.

To achieve this, and to complete ambitious scrutiny work programmes, the Westminster Scrutiny Commission usually meets four times per municipal year, whilst the individual Policy and Scrutiny Committees each usually meet six times.

**Figure 1:** Westminster City Council Policy and Scrutiny Committee Structure and relevant task groups 2021-22



## 1.1 Beyond the Committee Meeting Cycle: Extraordinary Meetings, Task Groups, Single Member Studies

To inform policy development and examine specific issues in more depth, committees can interrogate issues in other ways beyond the cycle of scheduled committee meetings. Policy and Scrutiny Committees typically also establish Councillor-led task groups (TGs), which allow more time to investigate the issues in more depth. The work of a task group can take between four months and a year to complete, depending upon whether a rapid response or longer term investigations are required, and can be formed from a smaller sub-group of scrutiny members of one Policy and Scrutiny Committee, or across two or more committees. As part of this work, Councillors will often hear evidence from external expert witnesses, question key Council officers and Cabinet Members, consult with relevant stakeholders and conduct site visits. Alternatively, a P&S committee may hold an Extraordinary Meeting (EM) in order to bring all stakeholders together to better understand and evaluate a particular time-critical issue.

The findings of task groups and extraordinary meetings are reported back to the committee that originally commissioned the work and any recommendations are presented to the Cabinet Member who by statute must reply within two months, setting out any course of action that they intend to undertake.



An individual member can also examine an issue in detail on behalf of the sponsoring Policy and Scrutiny Committee, with support from the Westminster Scrutiny Team. This is called a Single Member Study (SMS). Like task group work, the SMS work allows investigation over a longer period of time beyond the confines of a single committee meeting and is often undertaken by a member with a particular interest in a topic.

Over the last year, the Policy and Scrutiny Committees commissioned two task groups and held two extraordinary meetings (Fig 1). A summary of each, together with its key findings and recommendations, is set out in section relevant to the commissioning Committee as follows:

- Finance, Smart City & City Management: Budget Task Group (annual);  
Floods (EM);
- Business and Children: Children and Young People's  
Mental Health (TG); and  
Marble Arch Mound project (EM)

## **1.2 Committee Work Programmes**

Work programmes set the agenda for the regular meetings of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees. The work programmes are determined by the P&S Committee chair and their committee, with overall oversight and determination of the work programmes for all of the committees resting with the Westminster Scrutiny Commission. Work programmes are typically developed at the start of the municipal year and reflect a combination of:

- issues affecting residents of which members are aware;
- topical issues which have an impact on Westminster;
- the policy development programme of the Council; or
- reviews requested by Council directorates where they are seeking an internal but objective evaluation of a service.

The work programme is flexible to allow for urgent or unexpected issues to be considered as the municipal year progresses.

To find out more about each Policy and Scrutiny Committee and its work over the course of the year, please refer to the sections below and also visit the webpages for the relevant committee to find upcoming meeting dates and agenda.

## **1.3 Suggestions for Scrutiny Topics**

Westminster scrutiny also encourages residents to suggest items for the scrutiny work programme. 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). For a topic to be considered, it must affect a large proportion of the Westminster population or

adversely affect a particular Westminster community of association<sup>1</sup>, interest<sup>2</sup> or place<sup>3</sup>. Please point to any evidence in support of your concerns. Whilst you can submit a proposal anonymously, it would help if a member of the scrutiny team can contact you to understand your concerns and to identify the most appropriate Policy and Scrutiny Committee for the submission of your topic suggestion.

#### **1.4 Attending Policy and Scrutiny Committee meetings**

Members of the public and press are welcome to attend Policy and Scrutiny Committee meetings. These are usually held in Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP, on the 18<sup>th</sup> Floor, unless otherwise stated. Since 2020 and the legislation concerning local government meetings necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, our P&S Committee meetings are also live-streamed and accessible virtually. However, Task Group meetings are open to attendance by the public only at the discretion of the Chairman of the task group in question.

If you would like to attend a Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting, or should you have any other questions, please feel free to contact the Westminster Scrutiny Team at [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk).

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<sup>1</sup> Such as people from Greece or deaf people

<sup>2</sup> Such as those that are members of tennis clubs or voluntary organisations

<sup>3</sup> People living in a locality such as a ward



## 2. Summaries of the work of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees

### 2.1 Westminster Scrutiny Commission

#### Members:



#### Chair

Karen Scarborough



Iain Bott



Jim Glen



Adam Hug



Gotz Mohindra



Tim Roca

#### What does the Westminster Scrutiny Commission do?

The Westminster Scrutiny Commission (the Commission) is the overarching scrutiny body which is responsible for the management and co-ordination of Westminster City Council's Policy and Scrutiny function. As mentioned, the Commission exercises overall responsibility for the scrutiny work programme. Currently, the members of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission are the Chairmen of the respective Policy and Scrutiny Committees, alongside two minority party representatives.

The Commission is responsible for the work programmes of all the Policy and Scrutiny Committees and has responsibility for scrutinising a number of corporate, cross-organisation operations of the Council including:

- ❖ strategy and communications;
- ❖ central government relations activity;
- ❖ the Council's Emergency Preparedness planning;
- ❖ growth;
- ❖ performance;
- ❖ Climate Emergency;
- ❖ equalities; and
- ❖ the Council's Pay Policy.

The Westminster Scrutiny Commission is also responsible for scrutiny of Westminster City Council's Leader, Cllr Rachael Robathan, and the Chief Executive, Stuart Love.

### 2.1.1 Regular updates

In the current municipal year, since May 2021, the Westminster Scrutiny Commission met three times. Members received updates from the Leader of the Council on matters within her portfolio and from the Chief Executive on matters of corporate interest.

The Leader's updates have included topics such as: the Afghan refugee resettlement scheme; the al fresco dining schemes which were in place between April and 30 September 2021; the Council's consultation and engagement processes; virtual and hybrid meetings in the COVID-19 context; and the implications of the Budget and Tax Day for Westminster City Council.

The Chief Executive's updates have previously covered corporate wide issues such as: Westminster Connects; working with NHS partners on vaccine roll-out; the work of the Council's Economy and Public Health teams to support residents in a return to employment; and support for rough sleepers.

The Commission reviewed reports on the following issues:

- the Council's corporate strategy, [City for All](#);
- COVID-19 and vaccination programmes in Westminster;
- the Council's Emergency Preparedness planning;
- Climate Emergency;
- the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's finances;
- the 2021 Staff Survey

## 2.2 Adults and Public Health Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### Members



**Chair**  
Iain Bott



Margot Bright



Ruth Bush



Nafsika Butler-Thalassis



Maggie Carman



Danny Chalkley



Angela Harvey



Selina Short

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

The committee examines work that falls under the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health (currently Cllr Tim Mitchell).

Key programmes and areas of policy that the committee looks at are: Adult Social Care safeguarding; Adult Social Care support for vulnerable adults; Public Health Services; Adult Social Care commissioning; Adult Social Care provided services and Health Partnerships.

### **2.2.1 Highlights from the year**

#### **i. Obesity in Westminster**

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's obesity strategy and how it plans to reduce obesity rates across the City.

The Committee reflected that tackling obesity was complex and multifaceted. Senior Officers were of the view that the Council needed to change its approach to tackling obesity and that a whole-systems approach is required, with multi-agency working across the Clinical Commissioning Group and Northwest London.

The key themes that emerged from the Committee's discussions were:

- joint working between Council directorates. Officers provided an example of effective cross-council working, such as ensuring streets are well-lit so that residents feel safer to be active and walk around the City;
- the Council's physical health offer and the range of activities available for young people that do not like competitive sports;
- the importance of educating residents about nutritional, healthy diets and also providing them with cooking skills; and
- the importance of a whole-family approach

The Committee concluded that this topic was worthy of deeper investigation and instructed Scrutiny Officers to begin scoping work on a Task Group investigating obesity and metabolic diseases amongst children and adults in Westminster.

#### **ii. Public Health Funerals**

The Committee received a [report](#) summarising the Council's public health funerals procedure. These are funerals arranged by the Council where the person is a resident who does not appear to have the means to afford a funeral or may have arrived within the jurisdiction of Westminster through tragic circumstances. It was noted that this was the first time that public health funerals had ever been scrutinised by a Policy and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee had also noted that public health funeral arrangements would be tendered for re-procurement in 2022, and reflected on the contents of a recently published [Quaker Social Action report](#) about the accessibility of public health funerals.

The Committee heard from a variety of witnesses which included Westminster City Council officers, a local firm of funeral directors, as well as the London Borough of Brent officer who manages public health funerals in Brent.

The key themes that emerged from the Committee discussions were:

- the referral rates for public health funerals during and post the COVID-19 lockdowns;
- whether the term, “public health funeral” was appropriate or if other terms would be more accessible to the public;
- the recovered costs from public health funerals and how the service forecasts its budget;
- whether cremations and burials took place according to the known wishes and practices of the deceased; and
- the Council’s communication to its residents about this service.

The Committee also discussed and praised the resilience of council officers working on this issue and discussed how Westminster City Council could improve awareness of public health funerals service amongst members and residents. Committee members noted that, whilst the service was included on the People First website which advises on independent living, this was not easy to find and recommended that it should also be included on the Council’s main website, to be more easily accessible.

The Committee proposed to further scrutinise public health funerals when more data had been received from the service. The aim would be to support the re-procurement of the contract in 2022.

### **iii. The temporary closure of in-patient wards at the Gordon Hospital**

The Committee had requested that regular update reports on the Gordon Hospital become a standing item on its agenda and so receives updates from Central North-West London (CHWL) on the temporary but continuing closure, without consultation, of the in-patient wards at the Gordon Hospital. Committee members also conducted a site visit to the Gordon Hospital and St Charles Hospital mental health facilities in June 2021. The Committee expressed its deep dissatisfaction with the situation and sought the early re-opening of the wards. The Committee asked questions of CNWL on the following:

- the extent to which Westminster’s residents had felt the impact of the loss of the wards in Westminster’s only in-patient facility, the Gordon Hospital;
- the use of in-patient facilities outside of CNWL (“out of area placements”);
- the length of stay of patients;
- post-discharge community care for vulnerable residents and where concerned neighbours should go to help; and
- the pressures on the St Charles Hospital and the impacts on RBKC residents as a result of the closure of the Gordon Hospital.

Scrutiny Officers arranged a roundtable for P&S Committee Members and the Chief Executive of CNWL to discuss the Gordon Hospital in greater detail in October 2021.

### 2.2.2 Regular Updates

During the year, the Committee received regular updates from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, from Healthwatch as well as reports/updates on the following:

- update from NHS North-West London Integrated Care System on elective surgery;
- update on the impacts of COVID-19;
- Mental Health provision in Westminster;
- COVID-19 vaccination programme update;
- Safeguarding Adults Executive Board Annual Report;
- Oral Health;
- the Council's Autism Strategy;
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessments; and
- vaccine uptake in the City of Westminster.

## 2.3 Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### Members



### Chair

Karen Scarborough



Geoff Barraclough Christabel Flight Lindsey Hall Aicha Less Eoghain Murphy



Tim Roca



Mark Shearer

### CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Alix Ascough Wasim Butt  
Marina Coleman Mark Hewitt  
Ryan Nichol

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

The committee examines work that falls under the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning and the Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning.

Key programmes and areas of policy that this committee looks at are: Business Support and Economic Development; Employment; the Council's Licensing Policy and Service; Town Planning; Planning Policy; Place-Shaping; the Westminster Adult Education Service; the Oxford Street District programme; Children's Social Care and safeguarding; Commissioning for Children and Young People; Schools; Libraries and Registrars; and Science, Technology, (Arts) and Mathematics (STEAM), internships, and City Lions.

The committee's remit also includes the statutory scrutiny of education programmes and policies. Given this, the committee membership also includes co-opted representatives from the following:

- Church of England Diocese;
- Roman Catholic Diocese;
- Parent Governors; and
- Headteachers from local schools or academies.

### **2.3.1 Highlights from the year**

#### **i. Health and Safety in Schools**

The Committee received a report on the Council's internal audit of health and safety policies in schools. This matter was referred to this Committee by the Audit and Performance Committee to understand whether Westminster City Council needed more strategic oversight of health and safety procedures across all schools in Westminster. The Committee heard about the five-year audit cycles and how the Internal Audit team had undertaken thematic work in the interim period. This had led to the examination of school health and safety policies during the lockdown period.

The key themes that emerged from the Committee's discussions were:

- the Council's legal responsibility which extended only to community schools. The Committee was advised that the Council had limited powers and oversight over health and safety policies across all schools in the City;
- the Council's provision of health and safety guidance to all schools on the re-opening of school premises after the Covid-19 lockdowns; and
- the use of the 'EVOLVE system' for all schools. The Committee heard that this system allowed all schools to upload risk assessments.

The Committee noted the report and welcomed the use of the EVOLVE system in order to share templates and guidance amongst schools.

## **ii. The School Inclusion Pilot**

The Committee received a report on the School Inclusion Pilot, run by the Early Help team in Westminster. This programme works with vulnerable children and their families with the aim of reducing school exclusions.

Aaron Sumner (Headteacher, Hallfield Primary) and Rachel Kelly (Deputy Head, St Augustine's High School) also attended to give their views on how the programme has helped their schools. The Committee heard how the pilot shaped a "whole school" philosophy in supporting children and had assisted in a more proactive approach to supporting children at risk of exclusion and their families.

The key themes that emerged from the Committee discussions were:

- the programme's focus, which encourages schools to adopt a trauma-informed approach to setting attendance and behaviour policies;
- the programme's operation which includes work with children **and** with their families as well. This aspect of the programme was warmly welcomed by the teachers present at the Committee's meeting;
- the importance of learning about trauma and the positive impact that this learning has had in supporting children throughout the pandemic; and
- the pilot's success in engaging with families and lowering the rates of informal exclusions amongst children they are working with. The Committee heard that this success has led to this programme becoming permanent.

## **iii. School Uniforms**

The Committee received a report from the Council's School Standards team on how it intends to work with Westminster schools to lower the cost of school uniforms, following new guidance issued to schools (Education (Guidance about the Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021). This followed a [report](#) by The Children's Society in 2020 looking at the cost of school uniforms as a barrier to education.

The Committee heard that the Council would provide signposting to families who required additional support, which could also include translation services, where needed. Further suggestions included Council liaison with neighbouring boroughs to investigate alternative schemes and potential for Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs) and other associations to collaborate on providing second-hand items. The Committee requested that the inclusion of footwear in calculating the average Westminster uniform spend should also be investigated by the School Standards Team.



## **2.3.2 Task Groups and Extraordinary Meetings**

### **i. Children and Young People's Mental Health Task Group**

Recognising that pressures on the mental well-being of Westminster's children and adolescents were more acute than for previous generations, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Task Group (CYPMH) was established in May 2021 to begin an inquiry into local, regional and national contexts and how to prepare young people and mitigate for the effects on mental health, with emphasis on the Covid-19 context. This came about because the Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee decided to investigate the impacts of the global pandemic on the mental health of Westminster's youngest residents in a joint task group with the Adults and Public Health P&S Committee. The COVID-19 pandemic brought existing health inequalities in the UK to the forefront and this was the case in Westminster too, with the pandemic's impacts accelerating the levels of mental health issues amongst our residents, particularly our vulnerable and younger residents.

However, as the CYPMH Task Group has discovered, whilst the COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges and increased need for mental health services, it has also brought together local partners with a renewed sense of urgency and ambition to tackle this growing crisis. This shared determination came through strongly throughout the task group inquiry's evidence sessions, where CYPMH Task Group members heard from NHS service providers; the voluntary sector; Council Officers in Sport, Leisure and Active Communities Service, Children's Services and Public Health; the UK Mental Health Ambassador (Department for Education); and schools as well as from young people via Young Healthwatch and Westminster Youth Council.

The Task Group was able to see how the Council's programme of work with local partners was able to provide support for the mental health and well-being of Westminster's children and young people, despite constraints and challenges. The investigations showed how Westminster City Council's Early Help offer, which is considered exemplary, provides an array of innovative targeted and universal support available to children and young people across Westminster. Members heard that, where there are any gaps in provision, the Council has made significant progress in addressing them, and is working to develop a truly comprehensive offer.

In common with every other local authority across the country, the CYPMH Task Group heard how Westminster's early intervention services could be expanded if additional funding were made available and, whilst costs rise each year, funding does not necessarily rise proportionately. Whilst the Council runs several services in tandem with local partners to boost the early intervention mental health offer, these are predominantly pilot or smaller-scale programmes. The Task Group is aware of the potential savings for other services, including education settings, NHS crisis care, and the criminal justice system, as well as improved outcomes for individual children, young people,

and families, and discussed how these improved outcomes warrant increased strategies for investment.

The CYPMH Task Group is finalising its report and recommendations for publication in Spring 2022. These recommendations include adopting a whole Council strategy, whole community approach towards supporting and improving the mental well-being of Westminster's youngest residents. From its investigations and reflected in its recommendations, the CYPMH Task Group considered that Westminster's Children's Services alone cannot shoulder the burden of the Council's approach to the mental health needs amongst Westminster's children and adolescents.

The Task Group's investigatory work acknowledges that, whilst the local authority has a central role to play in co-ordinating local partners, community services, schools and the NHS all play equal roles in supporting families to provide healthy and happy childhoods for Westminster's children. Through recommendations about improving the awareness of all services and their referral pathways, with targeted communications campaigns aimed at young people at risk of developing mental health issues, we can make these services more accessible and less daunting to our children and young people. The Task Group also recognises that its work may not yet be complete, as the consequences and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental well-being of children and young people will continue to be felt for years to come.

## **ii. The Mound Arch Mound project - Extraordinary Meeting**

As part of the Council's £150 million Oxford Street District (OSD) programme, and as an attraction to the City in the context of the pandemic, the Council had undertaken the Marble Arch Mound project, which involved construction of a viewing platform experience at Marble Arch in the West End. Whilst visitor numbers to the Marble Arch Mound reached approximately 250,000, the attraction experienced setbacks and there was corporate learning needed as the project's costs exceeded £6.558 million. At an extraordinary meeting in October 2021, the Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the Marble Arch Mound project. The Committee received Westminster City Council's Internal Review Report in public and closed sessions, with the Chief Executive, Stuart Love, providing context. Stuart Love explained that the project was conceived during COVID-19 and he also referred to the pandemic's impact on the City, though he acknowledged that this did not excuse the mismanagement of the project, errors and the hiding of costs. Stuart Love emphasised that this was not done for personal gain by the officers concerned and that the consequences had been devastating for them.

The Committee asked a number of questions, including questions concerning recruitment processes and due diligence, project management and reporting, the parameters of the Council's Internal Review, the Council's corporate culture, the use of the Highways budget, governance, management of risk; and the Council's Member/Officer protocol.

Following deliberations, the Committee made the following seven recommendations:

- a. Enhance the oversight arrangements for high profile projects involving complexity, risk and innovation to minimise the risks identified in this report (i.e. significant project-overspend, circumvention of existing governance processes and lack of robust project management);
- b. Strengthen the terms of reference to the Capital Review Group and introduce a new commercial project assurance gateway. Ensure a reporting function/regular, formal reports;
- c. Explore and recommend options for senior level resourcing (Director and above) to ensure appropriate capacity, expertise and capability and encourage diversity of thought;
- d. The Standards Committee to prioritise the review of the Member/Officer Protocol;
- e. Undertake an audit of the Council's Highways contract management function in order to ensure that the contract management issues identified by the Westminster City Council Internal Review are not repeated;
- f. Recruitment decisions for temporary / fixed term appointments over £100,000 to go to a panel of relevant members, officers and (as necessary) independent experts for review to determine that appropriate skills and competencies are covered. Final review by a member panel; and
- g. Review of the resourcing of P&S Committees, with training to be provided for scrutiny chairmen, scrutiny members and officers.

The Committee received an update from the Chief Executive at its meeting in February 2022: implementation of the recommendations is in progress.

### **2.3.3 Regular Updates**

During the year, this Committee received a standing verbal update of any urgent safeguarding issues: none were received. Members also received regular updates from the Cabinet Members for Business, Licensing and Planning and for Young People and Learning.

### **Reports**

In addition to the highlighted reports listed above, the Committee received and discussed the following reports

- Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report;
- The Council's Gambling Policy;
- Oxford Street District Regeneration Project;
- School Performance;
- School Uniforms; and
- Westminster Investment Service.

## 2.4 Communities, Regeneration & Housing Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### Members



#### Chair

Jim Glen<sup>4</sup>



Barbara Arzymanow



Liza Begum



Antonia Cox



Elizabeth Hitchcock



Matt Noble



Ian Rowley



Hamza Taouzzale

### What does the committee do?

This P&S Committee examines work which falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Housing (currently Cllrs Heather Acton and David Harvey respectively).

The Committee looks at the following key programmes and areas of policy: Housing Services, including allocations; Housing Revenue Account; Temporary Accommodation and Rough Sleeping (housing-based services); Regeneration; Voluntary and Community Sector relations and support; Westminster Connects; Ward Budgets; Community Engagement and Inclusion; Police liaison; Community Protection services; Integrated Gangs Unit; Air Quality; and Rough Sleeping (street-based services).

#### 2.4.1 Reports

During the year, Members received regular updates from the Cabinet Members for Housing and for Communities and Regeneration. Members also requested reports or updates and discussed the following:

- Report of the Metropolitan Police Service;
- Ward Budget Programme;
- Nuisance noisy vehicles, car meets and the use of Public Spaces Protection Orders;

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<sup>4</sup> Cllr Jim Glen joined scrutiny in October 2021 when he became the Chair of this P&S Committee. Prior to this, the Chair was Cllr Andrew Smith, who stepped down in October 2021 to become the Lord Mayor.

- Air Quality;
- Capital Works Programme;
- Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document;
- Rough Sleeping Strategy; and
- Challenging Futures Strategy

## 2.5 Finance, Smart City & City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### Members



### Chair

Gotz Mohindra



Ian Adams



Lorraine Dean



Paul Dimoldenberg



Adam Hug



Pancho Lewis



Eoghain Murphy



Emily Payne

### What does the committee do?

The committee examines work that falls under the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City, and the Cabinet Member for City Management (currently Cllrs Paul Swaddle and James Spencer respectively). 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.

The committee looks at the following key programmes and areas of policy: Waste and Street Cleansing; Highways; Parking; Leisure; Parks and Open Spaces; Mortuaries and Cemeteries; Capital Programme; Procurement; Smart City programme/Digital Innovation; Digital Offer and Website; Broadband; Customer Services; Legal; Culture, Tourism, Public Art and City of Sculpture.

## **2.5.1 Highlights from the year**

### **i. Report on the Oxford Street District programme**

In May 2021 the Committee received a report on the Oxford Street District programme. 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, such as the City of Barcelona.

The key themes that emerged from the Committee's discussion were:

- the greening of the area, including tree-planting;
- the future of work and retail;
- zero carbon aims; and
- the importance of working with BIDs, landowners, businesses and amenity societies.

The Committee acknowledged the work involved in delivering the plan and requested to be kept informed at a future meeting.

### **ii. Procurement Strategy**

The Committee received a written report and presentation on the Council's new procurement strategy. The Committee reflected that the Council spends over £500 million on third party services and discussed the quality and quantitative objectives by which the procurement strategy is evaluated. Other issues discussed included:

- how procurement contracts are reviewed, and lessons are learnt;
- how the Council uses procurement contracts to promote diversity and inclusion;
- the experiences of small businesses when tendering for Council contracts;
- how the Council can more widely advertise its tenders;
- the Preston Model – a procurement model that focuses on community wealth building; and
- competitive tendering.

The Committee welcomed the development of the Council's responsible procurement strategy and asked for an annual report on its implementation that would include contract reviews and lessons learnt reports.

## **2.5.2 Task groups and Extraordinary Meetings**

### **i. Budget Task Group**

At Westminster, a task group is used to scrutinise the Council's budget and so forms a standing task group under the auspices of the P&S Committee with the remit of scrutinising the finance portfolio. For 2021/2022, the Budget Task

Group met on three occasions in January 2022. In their deliberations, the Task Group members sought assurances from officers on several points including:

- managing the impact of changing service demand priorities;
- the deliverability of several projects; and
- how external economic factors will continue to put pressure on the Council's finances.

There were also a number of risks that the Budget Task Group highlighted and challenged during the meetings, namely:

- how the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the local and national economy. The Government's support over the pandemic will continue to have a long-term impact on public finances. This is being seen in rising inflation and interest rates. Members noted that these factors would present continuing future challenges for the Council's finances;
- that uncertainty around income streams, like that from parking, commercial waste and advertising sites, presents an ongoing risk and they also noted the Council's budgetary estimates for economic recovery;
- the sizeable impact that the delayed Fair Funding Review will have on Westminster; and
- that reprofiled savings were largely because of the continuing impact of COVID-19 but that it is important that they are achieved alongside new savings in order to maintain strong financial control ahead of the Fair Funding Review.

The Task Group members were reassured by the strong record of budgetary control in Westminster and recognised that the Council's reserve policy had served to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on council finances. Furthermore, they noted that the 2022/23 budget had flexibility built into it which will mitigate against continued uncertainty around COVID-19 and the local and national economy.

## **ii, Extraordinary Meeting: Flooding**

In July 2021, extreme weather resulted in flood warnings for various parts of the UK. On 12 July 2021, a month's rainfall fell in just one hour, whilst parts of London on 25 July saw up to two months of rainfall across three to four hours. Given that figures have been published by the London mayor's office showing that 200,000 homes and workplaces, as well as 25% of rail stations in the capital and 10% of the network, a fifth of London schools, are all at high risk of flooding if extreme temperatures and flooding get worse, the scrutiny function understood that there were lessons to be taken from the events in Westminster in July. The Committee held an Extraordinary Meeting on 30 September 2021 at Porchester Hall, regarding the July flooding incidents.



The meeting venue of Porchester Hall was chosen as this had been the reception point for residents affected by the floods on the night of 12 July 2021.

The Committee welcomed witnesses from Westminster City Council's Environment and City Management Directorate, Thames Water, the London Fire Brigade, the Environment Agency, and the Metropolitan Police Service. The Committee had also decided to hear deputations from one Ward Councillor from wards affected by the flooding events of July 2021 as well as directly canvassing questions from residents and organisations (such as local housing associations) via the [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk) address.

Matters raised by the nominated ward councillors included:

- the trauma and loss of property experienced by flooded residents
- the failure of authorities to offer adequate support to victims
- existing flood prevention measures and their inadequacy
- financial ramifications for residents and issues with insurance
- investigation and investment in measures to prevent future flooding.

The Committee also considered the following reports:

- **Westminster City Council Interim Section 19 Report:** The Committee received a written update from Westminster City Council's Environment and City Management Directorate.
- **Thames Water Interim Briefing Report:** The Committee received a written update from Thames Water concerning the flooding incidents of July 2021 in the City of Westminster. The Committee heard that the full report of the independent review commissioned by Thames Water into the July floods would be completed in early 2022. The Committee requested the report be shared with its members when completed.
- **London Fire Brigade Briefing Report:** The Committee received a written update from the London Fire Brigade about 12 July 2021.

The Committee's lines of questioning included:

- the causes of the floods and the reasons that water exceeded the drainage system's capacity;
- the failure of existing flood prevention schemes and measures;
- the inadequate response and poor communication from Thames Water to affected customers;
- the frequency of similar flooding events across London;
- climate change and the unpredictability of weather changes;
- the likelihood of future flooding events at a scale equal to or greater than those seen in July;
- steps that can be taken to future-proof homes and businesses;
- affected residents' insurance claims and the saleability of their homes; and
- the suitability of the current drainage and sewage systems and the possibility of a major overhaul.

The Committee agreed that reports on the flood response should be considered again by the Committee once the independent review commissioned by Thames Water had been completed, which was scheduled for 2022. The Committee also proposed a task group that would work to identify what the Council and its partners could do to further help protect communities from flooding events.

### **2.5.3 Regular updates and Reports**

During the year, Members received regular updates from the Cabinet Members for Finance and Smart City and for City Management. They also requested reports on and discussed the following:

- resident focus and inclusivity in Smart City;
- the Transport for London E-Scooter Trial;
- the update of the Westminster City Council website; and
- proposals for Members' IT in the next electoral cycle.

### 3. Acknowledgements and Further Information

The Policy and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen consider that scrutiny is an independent yet collaborative process, the success of which depends on the involvement of many individuals and organisations, too numerous to list here. The Committee Chairmen therefore wish to acknowledge and thank the following:

- all the councillors involved in the scrutiny function at Westminster, who form the membership of Westminster's Policy and Scrutiny Committees;
- those members who also join the various scrutiny Task Groups and devote additional time to their scrutiny work;
- the Cabinet Members for their continuing support and openness to scrutiny recommendations;
- the independent external expert witnesses, who generously give their time and expertise to improve Westminster services for our residents;
- the Westminster officers who prepare and present the reports; and
- the Westminster Policy and Scrutiny Team for their support over the last four years.

If you would like more information about how scrutiny works at Westminster or if you wish to make a suggestion about areas for scrutiny by one of the committees, **please contact us** at [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk).

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