



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

**Business and Children's
POLICY and SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
2 February 2022**

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of the meeting of the **Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **2 February 2022** at **6.30pm**.

Hybrid meeting via Microsoft Teams and Rooms 18.01-03, 18th floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Karen Scarborough (Chairman), Geoff Barraclough, Lindsey Hall (virtual), Aicha Less, Eoghain Murphy, Tim Roca, Mark Shearer.

Co-Opted Members Present: Marina Coleman, Mark Hewitt (both virtual)

Also present: Councillor Timothy Barnes (Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning), Councillor Matthew Green (Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning), Daniella Bonfanti (Cabinet Manager, virtual), Ian Heggs (Bi-Borough Director of Education), Tracey Chin (Policy and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning and Housing), Artemis Kassi (Lead Scrutiny Advisor), Stuart Love (Chief Executive) and Richard Stanley (Tri-borough Deputy Director of Education)

1. MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 There were no changes to Membership
- 1.2 Councillor Christabel Flight was unable to attend and sent apologies. Ryan Nichol (Elected representative, Parent Governor) was unable to attend and sent apologies. Alix Ascough (Co-opted Representative, Head of All Souls Primary) was unable to attend and sent apologies. Wasim Butt (Co-opted Representative, Head of Beachcroft AP Academy) was unable to attend and sent apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Shearer declared an interest insofar as he ran a social enterprise delivering community campaigns for businesses, some of which included promoting children's outdoor activities.

ACTION

- The Committee requested the reintroduction of Members' Standing Declarations of Interests.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The Committee noted that Councillor Hall's attendance had been omitted in the minutes of the meeting held on 29th November 2021 and requested this be corrected for public record.
- 3.2 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting on 29th November 2021 be approved, pending the above correction.

4. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS, LICENSING AND PLANNING

- 4.1 The Committee received a written update from the Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning. It was noted that a correction be made to Item 1.1 of the report (West End Pop-Up Project): it was Grosvenor who was working with The Good Store on South Molten Street to activate the units, and not the Crown Estate, as stated.

Gambling Policy

- 4.2 A consultation carried out between September and November last year had received responses from those in the gambling industry, with a lack of resident responses. It was anticipated that any changes would come into effect in April, pending agreement at the next Full Council.

Westminster Night Markets

- 4.3 The Committee noted the success of the night market in China Town and, after having received positive feedback from residents, queried if this would be continued. It was acknowledged that the market had provided much needed support to the local community after diminished footfall and agreed that any further opportunities would be welcomed.

Covid-19 Grant Programmes

- 4.4 The Committee queried the communication of Covid Grants for businesses as they had received reports that some businesses had been unaware of their eligibility for funding. It was confirmed that information had been circulated

through local newsletters, social media and the business information district, but appreciated that not all businesses may have been aware. It was agreed that information on additional funding would be passed to Members for information.

- 4.5 The Committee was advised that any local businesses querying their eligibility for grants, could email businessunit@gov.uk, where more specialised advice and opportunities for alternative funding could be provided. The Committee was asked that the positive feedback from local businesses on this service, be noted.

Training and Employment Schemes

- 4.6 In response to a Member's query, it was confirmed that the Westminster Wheels scheme was currently recruiting new trainers, so would be continuing for the foreseeable future.
- 4.7 The Committee queried the assessments made on funding for training schemes. It was reported that based on research, the hospitality sector was highly represented in the City. Members queried whether there were training opportunities available in the software coding sector. It was confirmed that this was an area that was being investigated, with trainings available for other sectors as well.

Retrofitting

- 4.8 The Committee queried the review and agreements for the retrofitting of local Historic England listed properties with the relevant heritage organisations. It was confirmed that Historic England maintained their own guidelines.
- 4.9 The policy had been amended to allow Grade II properties to install slim-fit glazing. It was confirmed that it was still a requirement for applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent to have this fitted with the appropriate materials.

Business Rates

- 4.10 The Committee queried whether there would be discounts to business rates from April 2022. It was confirmed that no information on this had been received.
- 4.11 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee note the continued work and forthcoming issues in this portfolio.

ACTIONS:

The Committee requested information on the following:

- Details of all Covid-19 grant programmes available to businesses.
- To confirm the date of the next Harrow Rd Forum meeting.

- The Committee to refer local businesses requesting funding to the Business Unit service for support.

5. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING

- 5.1 The Committee received a written update from the Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning who, with support from Ian Heggs, Bi-Borough Director of Education, responded to questions on the following topics:

Covid-19 Management in Schools

- 5.2 It was reported that the number of Covid-19 cases in schools had reached its peak and were now falling, although case numbers remained high. The focus was on getting the appropriate vaccination information circulated amongst parents and schools to encourage them to get their children vaccinated.
- 5.3 In response to a query regarding the vaccinations of 12+ year-olds, it was acknowledged that there was some resistance from parents, this did not cause significant concern.
- 5.4 The Committee requested that their appreciation and gratitude be expressed to all Head Teachers, teachers, staff and Governors for their continued support in keeping children in school under present challenging Covid circumstances with so many testing positive and having to self-isolate.

Schools' Performance

- 5.5 The Committee commended Hampden Gurney school for placing 9th in the City's schools list and extended praise to all top performing schools.

Sayers Croft

- 5.6 The Committee requested an update on the Sayers Croft review. It was confirmed that improvements in recovery management were being developed, with further recommendations to be made. No further details were available at the time. The Committee continued to maintain its support of Sayers Croft and noted the Council's ongoing work in ensuring its accessibility to children.

Pupil Decline

- 5.7 The Committee raised concerns on the declining numbers of pupils in the City's schools. It was stated that the issue was not specific to the City and reflected the continued decline of school-aged children in Central London and depopulation across the country. It was reported that the City was managing better when compared to some other London boroughs.
- 5.8 It was confirmed that the data would continue to be revised and provided to schools to enable suitable planning to be made going forward.

Home Education

- 5.9 The Committee queried what impact parents returning to the workplace would have on children who had been home educated during the pandemic. It was confirmed that cases of home education were being closely monitored, with processes in place requiring regular liaison with parents.

Pupil Funding Formula

- 5.10 The Committee queried the per pupil funding formula and whether there were any fairer alternatives. It was reported that this was an ongoing discussion at Schools Forum, with no alternatives to the current formula. It was confirmed there would be no cuts to frontline services in the foreseeable future.

School Merger

- 5.11 In response to parental concerns regarding the decision to merge two of the City's schools, the Committee sought clarification on the role of governing bodies in the process. It was explained that this would have been initiated by the governors and discussed with both schools and the Catholic Diocese, as well as the parents of attending pupils, before a formal decision was agreed by the Council. The Council maintained that they do not have a policy in allocating schools for mergers.

Free School Provisions

- 5.12 The Committee enquired about the continuation of free school meals and the availability of children's activities during half term and Easter. It was confirmed that both would be available. Further information would be circulated via schools, libraries, and electronic newsletters. It was agreed that Councillors' would be added onto the weekly school bulletin.
- 5.13 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee note the continued work and forthcoming issues in this portfolio.

ACTION:

- To add Councillors' contact details onto the weekly newsletter distribution list.

6. REPORTS OF ANY URGENT SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

- 6.1 There were no reports of any urgent safeguarding issues.

7. SCHOOL UNIFORM REPORT

- 7.1 The Committee received a report from the School Standards team detailing how it intends to work with Westminster schools to lower the cost of school uniforms, following new guidance issued to schools. The report was presented

by Ian Heggs, Bi-Borough Director of Education. It was agreed that the Council would provide the appropriate signposting to families who required extra support. The aim would be to monitor the queries received and advise accordingly.

- 7.2 In response to Member queries on how expectations could be managed before the school term began, Ian Heggs emphasised the importance of addressing parental concerns as early as possible. It was recommended that parents liaise with their school for information on access to funding, online second-hand uniform suppliers and additional services that may be needed.
- 7.3 Members recommended collaboration between the PTA and other associations to organise local second-hand uniform sales. It was recommended that research into neighbouring boroughs' uniform schemes could provide alternative solutions.
- 7.4 Members queried whether footwear was included in the allowance. It was agreed that further investigation was needed on this, with the findings brought to Committee in a future meeting.
- 7.5 **RESOLVED:** To note the work of the Children's Services team in supporting the City's families.

ACTION:

- To investigate whether footwear is included in the uniform allowance and how much is allocated towards this.

8. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE STRATEGY 2021

- 8.1 The Committee received a report on the School Performance Strategy, which was presented by the Tri-borough Deputy Director of Education, Richard Stanley, with support from Ian Heggs, Bi-Borough Director of Education. It was reported that secondary schools in the City had performed very well in GCSEs and A-Levels. It was confirmed that public exams and primary tests would be going ahead this year. Emphasis was now on monitoring Further Education and ensuring its accessibility to school leavers, especially those in the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) category.
- 8.2 The Committee queried the home education process and how the Council ensured the quality of service. It was explained that this was done through assessments and annual home visits to check progress. Timescales were given for parents to address any concerns raised.
- 8.3 The Committee queried the impact of the pandemic on children's learning skills. It was reported that a decline in children's writing and group learning skills had

been observed, especially where English was not their first language. It was noted that the overall impact varied between schools and families.

- 8.4 The Committee raised concerns on the number of exclusions of pupils with learning difficulties. It was reported that the Council and schools were exploring various models to address this, including a focus on underlying causes, early intervention and reviewing schools' policies. It was agreed an update on inclusions, exclusions and seclusions would be brought to a future meeting.
- 8.5 The Committee the praised the work of school staff during the pandemic and wondered if a formal thank-you could be considered. The Council acknowledged the hard work of school staff and noted the proposal for future consideration. It was confirmed that children and staff well-being was the current priority for the team.
- 8.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee note the contents of the report and the following recommendations:

ACTIONS

- To continue monitoring the number of young people in home education and provide an update at a future meeting.
- To continue to collect data on the number of fixed term exclusions, isolations and seclusions in schools and be provided with progress updates in implementing strategies to reduce these.

9. MARBLE ARCH MOUND – INTERNAL REVIEW UPDATE

- 9.1 The Committee received a verbal update from Stuart Love, the Council's Chief Executive, on the internal review of the Marble Arch Mound project, following the extraordinary Committee on 27 October 2021.
- 9.2 The update outlined the following recommendations with the actions taken:
- To strengthen the Council's programme management office, which had now been completed.
 - To review the Terms of Reference of the Capital Review Group, which had now been agreed.
 - A review of Member-Officer protocol, which was ongoing.
 - An audit of the Highways Contract Management function, which was in progress, with recommendations reported in due course.
 - The proposal for Band 6+ fixed-term contracts to go to a panel.
 - To provide scrutiny training to Councillors and Members.
- 9.3 A Statutory request was made by the Committee that the responses to the recommendations should be received from the Cabinet Members and Cllr Judith Warner, Chair of the Standards Committee in writing two weeks from the

date of this Committee meeting. The Committee also requested a copy of the Terms of Reference of the Capital Review Group.

9.4 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee note the update.

ACTIONS

The Committee requested the following:

- To receive written responses to the recommendations, as detailed in 9.3.
- To receive the revised Terms of Reference of the Capital Review Group.

10. DRAFT REPORT OF THE CYPMH TASK GROUP

10.1 The Committee received a verbal update on the Children and Young People's Task Group report from Artemis Kassi, Policy & Scrutiny Lead. The Committee noted the work of the Task Group which explored recommendations on improving the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people in Westminster, and the ongoing challenges in completing the report. It was confirmed that this would be finalised and circulated before 28 March.

10.2 The Committee thanked the officers and Task Group for their work on the report.

10.3 **RESOLVED:** That the progress update be noted, and the final draft of the report be brought to the next Committee on 31 March.

ACTION:

- The Committee requested that any recommendations arising from the report be tracked.

11. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

11.1 The Committee received a report from the Policy & Scrutiny Lead, Artemis Kassi, which outlined the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

11.2 It was discussed and agreed that the agenda items for the next Policy and Scrutiny meeting on 31 March would include reports on the Gambling Policy changes, the Westminster Investment Service, Affordable Housing (from a Planning perspective), Al-Fresco Dining Scheme and the Children and Young People' Mental Health Task Group. The Social Care Review 2021 was also suggested as an item for a future meeting.

11.3 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agree on the items proposed for the next meeting and note the report.

12. TERMINATION OF MEETING

12.1 The meeting ended at 20:59.

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____