



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Cabinet

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Monday 12th December, 2022**, Room 18.01, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Adam Hug (Chair), Aicha Less (Virtual), Tim Roca, Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Geoff Barraclough, David Boothroyd, Paul Dimoldenberg, Liza Begum and Matt Noble

**Also Present:** Stuart Love, Chief Executive, Parveen Akhtar, Director of Law

#### 1. MEMBERSHIP

There were no changes to the membership of Cabinet.

Councillor Less joined the meeting virtually and was therefore unable to vote on the items set before Cabinet this evening.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of Item 5, Universal Free School Meal Offer, Councillor Hug and Councillor Butler-Thalassis declared that they both have children who attend primary school in Westminster who will benefit from the universal free school meals offer.

Councillor Hug and Councillor Butler-Thalassis therefore gave notice that they would excuse themselves from the meeting for Item 5. Councillor Hug directed that Councillor Noble take the chair for this Item.

#### 3. MINUTES

The following minor revisions (emphasised in bold) were made to the minutes dated 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in relation to Item 5 (Priorities for the CIL) before being agreed as a true and correct record of the last meeting:

*Neighbourhood CIL projects **below £250,000** will be decided by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, currently Councillor Barraclough. Strategic CIL projects and Neighbourhood CIL projects **above £250,000** will be decided by Cabinet as part of the wider capital programme*

**RESOLVED:** Councillor Adam Hug, with the consent of the Members present, agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022, including the revision to the minutes for Item 5 (Priorities for CIL), were a true and correct record of the proceedings.

#### **4 SAFEGUARDING ADULTS EXECUTIVE BOARD ANNUAL REPORT**

Councillor Hug welcomed Lousie Butler, Bi borough Head of Adult Safeguarding to speak to the report and noted the absence of Aileen Buckton, Chair of the Adults Safeguarding Executive Board (“the Board”) who sadly could not make the meeting.

Councillor Hug asked that thanks be placed on record to Aileen for the hard and excellent work that she does as Chair and to all those that support the Board.

Councillor Hug invited Councillor Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Community Sector, to speak to the report.

Councillor Butler-Thalassis thanked all officers, members of the board and service users for the huge amount of work undertaken to produce the report, she told Cabinet colleagues that the report reflects the everyday hard work that the team do to support Westminster’s most vulnerable residents.

Councillor Hug invited Bernie Flaherty, Deputy Chief Executive and Bi-Borough Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health to add any further comment.

Cabinet heard that this is the fourth annual report from the Board and that those involved in delivering the report and the overall service have had to adopt new and different ways to listen and engage to ultimately make safeguarding accessible to all. As a result of this our residents are London Ambassadors meaning that they are helping to improve engagement across the city on the issue of Adult Safeguarding.

Bernie told Cabinet that the 2021/22 report reflects an ongoing commitment to evaluate the impact of Covid-19 on safeguarding activity and identify new concerns and challenges which the Board want to respond to.

Councillor Hug invited Lousie Butler to speak to the report.

Louise encouraged Cabinet to [look at the interactive version of the report online](#) as the videos that are included in this version really do give voice to the

safeguarding issues that many face and in addition highlight empower people to take action

Cabinet heard that there was an on-going commitment to exploring opportunities that have come out of COVID. For example, looking at how to make safeguarding accessible to everybody. Cabinet heard that this is not just about language but working with groups like the BAME Help Forum to contact hard to reach communities to explore what safeguarding means to them, and the fears and barriers they have in contacting the service.

Lousie also touched on the vital role of the ambassadors who work hard to engage with communities across the city. Their good work has made them the voice of London and they now provide strategic advice on safeguarding across London and makes Westminster one of the few local authorities who have a strong community voice in this area.

Lousie concluded by informing Cabinet that there is currently an investigation into two fire related deaths in Westminster. The Board is undertaking a partnership response to ensure that events like these are not repeated. The findings of this review will be included in the 2022/23 Safeguarding Adults Executive Board Report.

**RESOLVED: Cabinet note the findings of the Board as contained in the 2021/22 report.**

## **5 UNIVERSAL FREE LUNCH OFFER FOR PRIMARY PUPILS IN WESTMINSTER**

Report of the Bi-borough Executive Director for Children's Services

Councillor Adam Hug and Councillor Nafsika Butler-Thalassis excused themselves from this item. Councillor Matt Noble took the Chair for this item and invited Councillor Tim Roca to introduce the item as Cabinet Member for Young People, Learning and Leisure.

Cabinet heard that around 31,000 households are particularly at risk from the cost-of-living crisis in Westminster, many of these households are families with young children.

Councillor Roca went on to say that we know families are struggling with the cost of living and that children face going hungry at school as a result. The proposals set out in this report propose free lunches for all Westminster children in Years 3 to 6. This means that from January 2023 all Westminster children attending our primary schools will receive a free, healthy lunch.

Councillor Noble invited Sarah Newman, Bi-borough Executive Director of Children's Services to speak to the report. Sarah told Cabinet that eligibility for FSM as set by the government is low (see section 5.2 of the report which sets out eligibility criteria) with many people currently finding themselves just above the existing threshold for FSM. Attainment and attendance are affected by food insecurity. Attendance figures have slipped through COVID and are

not where we want them to be. This proposal is encouraging and schools are very much in favour and appreciative of the decision

Councillor Noble invited comments from Cabinet.

Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg told Cabinet colleagues that he was very much in favour of this decision and has already had positive feedback from residents and other stakeholders following the announcement that Westminster would provide FSM to all primary school children. In particular, he had received a message from one constituent to say how much this supports her and her family. Councillor Dimoldenberg concluded by saying that although this is a direct benefit for young children it also indirectly benefits parents as well who may have foregone food to provide for their children.

Councillor Noble told Cabinet that he had recently visited West London Synagogue and children there had asked what the Council is doing to support FSM and he was able to respond with good news, this decision supports our children and will have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

**RESOLVED – CABINET APPROVED THE RECCOMENDATIONS SET OUT IN SECTION 3, PAGE 56.**

## **6 COST OF LIVING SUPPORT**

Report of the Executive Director for Innovation and Change

Councillor Hug invited Pedro Wrobel, Executive Director for Innovation and Change to speak to this report.

We know many of our residents continue to face a very difficult winter. Given the cold weather predicted for the coming weekend the Council has seen a significant uptake in our Winter In The City. Venues such as the Abbey Centre reported they were full and there has been a doubling of online engagement regarding the scheme.

Councillor Hug thanked all officers involved, saying that the support set out in the report isn't the totality of what has been provided. Winter In The City has leveraged benefits in kind from venues across the city and the responsible business team is working to encourage stakeholders and partners to support the Cost-of-Living crisis.

Councillor Hug invited Cabinet to come forward with any comments.

Councillor David Boothroyd told Cabinet colleagues that they needed to be candid, saying that while they would look to support all residents over the winter constraints on resources mean we cannot.

Councillor Boothroyd went on to say that Cabinet would not be excused if they had resources available and failed to deploy them. The support outlined in the report has been carefully modelled to reach those that need it most, including through the use of direct payments which are the best way to reach people,

while energy vouchers will combat one of the worst impacts of the Cost-of-Living crisis.

Councillor Boothroyd raised an error in the reporting the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), this will be corrected and an updated EQIA will be provided.

Councillor Geoff Barraclough thanked his colleagues for bringing both this decision and the previous decision on Free School Meals forward, saying it will make a marked difference to the lives of Westminster residents.

Councillor Hug concluded by saying that this action was needed because Cabinet feel that adequate support has not been brought forward by Central Government to combat the scope and scale of the challenge and that he and his Cabinet colleagues will continue to work with officers to take a prudent and measured approach in how they provide support to combat the Cost-of-Living crisis.

**RESOLVED: CABINET APPROVED THE RECOMMENDATIONS AS SET OUT IN SECTION 2, PAGE 72**

**7 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS (INCLUDING COUNCIL TAX LOCAL REDUCTION SCHEME) AND COUNCIL TAX BASE REPORT**  
Report of the Executive Director for Finance and Resources

Councillor Boothroyd introduced this report which sought Cabinet's approval to bring forward a series of recommendations on the setting of Council Tax and associated discounts for 2023/2024 to Council in January 2023.

Cabinet heard that the report had two main elements. The first element being a straightforward confirmation of how many properties at which bands there are in Westminster. The second element centres around those discretionary discounts and premiums that the Council may wish to grant or impose on some properties. Councillor Boothroyd confirmed that a full Council Tax Relief scheme that gives 100 per cent support to low-income households will be retained.

Cabinet heard that care leavers and those flooded out of their properties will also benefit from Council Tax relief. The premium imposed on long term empty homes will continue as a deterrent to leaving property empty during a housing crisis.

Councillor Boothroyd drew Cabinet's attention to two contingencies within the report which would allow the long-term empty properties premium to come in slightly earlier as well as an additional premium on second homes should legislation allow it. These provisions are currently before Parliament as part of the Regeneration and Levelling Up Bill. Cabinet heard that these premiums would be imposed at the earliest opportunity if the City Council was given the power to do so.

Councillor Hug invited Gerald Almeroth, the Executive Director of Finance and Resources to provide any additional comments. Cabinet heard that the tax base as calculated has seen an increase of 0.67 %, this is equivalent to the number of additional properties in the borough. The budget assumes an increase of 1% therefore the growth of the tax base is slightly below expectations but this is not surprising given the effects of the pandemic and cost-of-living-crisis.

Councillor Hug concluded by saying that in addition to Councillor Boothroyd's comments around the long-term empty properties premium the Council has recruited an Empty Homes Officer who will be starting shortly.

**RESOLVED: CABINET APPROVED THE RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN SECTION 2, PAGE 97**

**8 FEES AND CHARGES REVIEW**

Report of the Executive Director for Finance and Resources

Councillor Boothroyd told Cabinet that this is an omnibus report that presents the recommended fees and charges for a wide range of council services for the following year (2023).

Cabinet heard that the income provided through fees and charges revenue is considerably more than that raised through Council Tax and in some instances sees the Council in competition with other service providers therefore thought needs to be given when setting fees and charges to ensure they provide an optimum income while not excluding residents from accessing services. This is a particular concern this year as inflationary pressures are forcing some fees up but were possible the Council wants to keep fees for healthy activities down in light of the cost-of-living crisis.

Councillor Hug invited Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director for Finance and Resources to comment on the report.

Gerald explained to Cabinet that cost increases have been based on the September CPI figure (10.1%). On average, the fees which the council has discretion to set have increased by 6%, though some have been set below that because of policy considerations or where the fees aren't related to fee recovery.

Councillor Hug invited comment from Cabinet.

Councillor Barraclough told Cabinet that fees for planning applications and building control services are going up quite sharply. Cabinet heard that this increase is due to the significant fall in the level of major planning applications received by the Council and while minor applications are running at a high level it is those fees levied against major planning applications that help maintain planning staff.

In order to maintain a good service, fees for major applications will increase, this still represents good value for money when you consider the benefit of building in Westminster and the associated land values. The increased fees will be similar to those charged by other inner London authorities like the City of London Corporation and Camden Council. Planning fees in Westminster have not been increased for some years and Councillor Barraclough sought to assure Cabinet that we maintain a good service for the money that we charge

**RESOLVED: CABINET APPROVED THE RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN SECTION 2, PAGE 112**

**9 RESPONSIBLE COMMISSIONING & PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

Report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources

Councillor Hug invited Councillor Boothroyd to introduce this report.

Councillor Boothroyd told Cabinet that how the council works with local business is crucial to making a positive change for local communities. In everything it does the Council must work to protect vulnerable people, protect the environment and help build the local economy. The most direct impact the Council has on businesses is when procuring goods and services.

Cabinet heard that this suite of documents helps to promote community wealth building, to deliver social value and promote high standards of conduct.

Councillor Boothroyd went on to thank Councillor Ellie Ormsby, Deputy Cabinet Member for Procurement and Finance for working with officers to bring forward these documents which include the first ever modern slavery statement from the City of Westminster.

In seeking more responsible procurement we have always been mindful that in most cases the most responsible suppliers with the best environmental and social approach will be local businesses based in our diverse city. We have been careful therefore not to add to their difficulties in running a business by setting an onerous compliance regime.

Councillor Hug invited Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director for Finance and Resources to comment on the report.

Gerald explained that the Council did have a previous Responsible Procurement Strategy that was set in February under the previous administration and that the aim in bringing forward this new strategy was to move it on to encapsulate Fairer Westminster objectives.

Cabinet heard that this year, the minimum RPC weighting was increased from 5% to between 10-20%, depending on the nature of the contract. Gerald told Cabinet that progress on this will be reviewed and continue to be evaluated

with the intention of working towards an increase of a minimum 20-30% by 2025/26. The strategy will be updated to include this intention and a copy of the revised strategy will be made available on-line with the papers for this meeting.

Councillor Hug asked that aside from working to communicate the detail of the strategy to business thought is also given as to how we include this work in wider communications on changes being made as a result of Fairer Westminster ambitions.

Councillor Barraclough told Cabinet colleagues that he warmly welcomed this new strategy and that he agrees with the approach taken by Councillor Boothroyd in cutting down on bureaucracy to encourage small businesses to take up public sector contracts.

**RESOLVED: CABINET APPROVED THE RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN SECTION 2, PAGE 173**

## **10 CAPITAL BUDGET RE-PROFILING & BUDGET CHANGES 2022/23**

Report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources

Councillor Hug invited Councillor Boothroyd to introduce this report.

Cabinet heard that this report reflects changes made by the new administration to the inherited capital programme to align it with the priorities set out in Fairer Westminster. It also takes into account some major capital schemes reprofiling spend into later years largely due to circumstances out with the Council's control.

A revised Capital Programme will form part of the budget considerations next year this report acts as an interim statement until then.

**RESOLVED: CABINET APPROVED THE RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN SECTION 2, PAGE 242**

The Meeting ended