



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 8th November, 2022**, Rooms 18.01 & 18.03, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Concia Albert, Paul Fisher (Chair), Sara Hassan, Patrick Lilley, Ralu Oteh-Osoka, Ian Rowley and Paul Swaddle.

**Also Present:** Councillor Geoff Barraclough (Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development) and Councillor David Boothroyd (Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform). Officers: Gerald Almeroth (Executive Director of Finance Resources), Deirdra Armsby (Director of Place Shaping and Town Planning), Haylea Asadi (Director Regeneration and Economic Development), Ruchi Chakravarty (Head of Place Shaping), Francis Dwan (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director Growth, Planning and Housing), Clare O'Keefe (Temp Lead Policy and Scrutiny Advisor) and David Wilkins (Head of Programme and Smart Delivery).

#### 1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There were no changes to the membership.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3 MINUTES

3.1 That the minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 be agreed.

3.2 Resolved

- The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 were agreed with no amendments.

## **4 PORTFOLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND COUNCIL REFORM**

4.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor David Boothroyd, Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform, on priorities for the portfolio and any updates that have arisen. The Cabinet Member's address stated that since publication, a decision was taken on the Rating Advisory Panel, Member meetings regarding the Seymour Leisure Centre were taking place and Census data showed a decrease in number of residents, which is believed to have been temporarily exaggerated by the impact of the pandemic. The Cabinet Member then responded to questions on the following topics:

- Cost of Living Response, a breakdown of additional costings.
- Current level of reserves (general fund balance).
- Impact of increased interest rate on the balance sheet. In follow up, the Cabinet Member was asked about the spread above the bond rate.
- Insourcing and the degree to which it would be considered across all outsourced works including housing repairs.
- Diverse supply-chain, including the cost of working with the Minority Supplier Development UK (MSDUK), how 'ethnic minority led businesses' was defined and whether this would act as a barrier to other suppliers such as those from a White working-class background.
- Decarbonisation and how businesses were selected for replacement boilers.
- Unspent monies from the Covid Relief fund and whether the remaining allocation could be spent elsewhere and, if so, where it was likely to be spent.
- Public Conveniences; when stood down, would the revenue generated from them be put towards the community they were in.
- Disaggregation of IT service from RBKC and the latest progress. It was asked that an update of this progress would be included in future cabinet updates.
- Ethical collection of unpaid council tax and the reasons behind why a substantive update has not come to the Committee.
- Lease extension for the Council's assets, given the rising cost of living, and whether there are plans to sell any assets.
- Report-it, the Council's reporting function on the website and what the 'contextual research' into it will involve.

#### 4.2 Actions:

1. Updating the Committee on what methods are in place to identify where old boilers still exist and are yet to be updated/decarbonised.
2. To include an update on progress with the disaggregation of IT services from Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in the next update (or, if appropriate, in regular updates going forward).

### **5 PORTFOLIO UPDATE - CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

5.1 The Committee received an update from Councillor Geoff Barraclough, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, on priorities for the portfolio and any updates that have arisen. The Cabinet Member's address started by bringing attention to the upcoming partial review of the City Plan at certain plans, affordable housing policy consultation, as well as upcoming supplementary planning documents on the public realm, carbon offsetting and the environment. From the Economic Development side, the Cabinet Member drew attention to Westminster Works and its success, Oxford Street District Programme, placemaking and CIL funding. The Cabinet Member then responded to questions on the following topics:

- Ukrainian Refugees, including what would happen and what priority would they be once the Council has identified them for economic and housing aid.
- Good Growth Fund, and the cost of extension to these schemes.
- Westminster Market and how the logistics of transactions will actually work.
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and whether this can be used to provide staffing/administrative funding for a neighbourhood forum to apply for funding.
- Job fairs, including how the Council can ensure that residents are getting the most out of these ventures.
- CIL Money, what expenditure on 'affordable housing enabling' was defined as. The Committee's concern that it may not be a valid use of CIL funding was noted by the Cabinet Member.
- Employment Programmes, whether built into the initiatives there were plans to evaluate the long-term outcomes and prospects for those who undertake the schemes.

#### 5.2 Actions

1. Following this update, the Committee agreed that an item on the Westminster Employment Service will be added to the list of unallocated items for consideration at future Committees.

## 6 SMART CITY PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

6.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development provided the Committee with a summary of the Smart City Programme and its purpose. David Wilkins, Head of Programme and Smart Delivery, raised 'notspots', small cell concessions, fibre connectivity, areas of planned expansion and the voucher scheme. The Committee was asked to consider questions on resident engagement, datasets and the challenges residents face. Members asked questions around the following themes:

- Copper Network, following the information that the Copper Network is to be switched off nationally by the end of 2025, the Committee asked how this would affect those who may not have any internet access in their homes.
- The offering of the Smart City programme for the elderly and vulnerable.
- Accessing online Council services without the internet.
- Leaflets and whether hard copies of notices for infrastructure works or other works would be provided.
- Offering for those with learning difficulties, the Committee asked whether the number of people in Westminster who had a learning disability to the degree whereby getting online is made difficult was known and what is done for them.
- Full fibre broadband, given the aims of the programme to hit 100%, Westminster's position relative to other local authorities was discussed.
- Interactive street furniture and how it is defined.
- The Committee identified that one of the great appeals of the outdoor offerings is that they act as an escape from technology and screens the degree to which smart solutions might threaten this.

### 6.2 Actions

1. The Committee to be provided with local ward maps of mobile phone service capacity on request.
2. The Committee requested details of the process of how the 'permitting team' inform affected residents of technology infrastructure digs so that they understand exactly why the road might be being dug up and for how long.
3. The Committee recommended that notices in future are especially clear and have in bold a summary sentence to explain the purpose and duration of disturbances.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT**

7.1 The Work Programme was discussed, and the following items were raised:

- When Corporate Properties is brought to the Committee it should focus on those with a direct economic impact. Ongoing projects or potential sales should be at the fore of any piece that comes to the Committee.
- Oxford Street District Programme, is sought as soon as can be relevant, preferably in the first meeting after the new year.
- Given the condensed calendar, busy schedules and the avoidance of meeting without purpose it was suggested as an action to either truncate, or preferably cancel the proceeding Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2022. This was taken as an action.

Action:

1. Determine what is appropriate for the 15<sup>th</sup> of December given the close proximity between the two meetings. If so, a truncated agenda may be considered.

The Meeting ended at 21.07

**CHAIR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_