



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

General Purposes

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held on **Wednesday 22nd February, 2023**, Rooms 18.01, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors David Boothroyd (Chair), Aicha Less and Paul Swaddle

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Matt Noble had joined the meeting remotely and would participate in the discussions on the agenda items, however it was confirmed that he would not be able to vote on any of the items.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2022 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4 APPROVAL OF COMPENSATION PAYMENT

- 4.1 The Committee was presented with a report providing details of a complaint submitted by a leaseholder through the Council's complaints process and to the Housing Ombudsman. Following this complaint, a compensation payment of £3,175 was required to be paid to the leaseholder from the Housing Revenue Account.
- 4.2 The Committee discussed the report and noted that the details of the complaint had been circulated prior to the meeting and that the payment had been approved by the Executive Director for Growth, Planning and Housing.

Members also briefly discussed the process with which complaints reports came before the Committee and suggested that this be examined.

RESOLVED:

That the payment of the compensation made to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's order be approved and noted.

5 CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

- 5.1 The Committee considered a paper providing an outline of the various sections of the Constitution which Officers had been reviewing and subsequent recommendations for change. These include changes to Full Council Standing Orders to introduce public participation in Full Council meetings, and what format this should take, and amendments to the list of Outside Bodies.
- 5.2 The Majority and Opposition Groups had been consulted and invited to review and provide comments on the proposals. It was noted that the proposals and options on how the new scheme could be shaped were based on best practice reviews from other councils as well as an informal, cross-party meeting of the General Purposes Committee in December 2022. The proposals were also informed by findings from a small (non-representative) survey of Westminster residents.
- 5.3 The Committee discussed in detail the various options available and were of the opinion that the proposals set out in Table 4 of the report would best support and facilitate the initiative on introducing resident participation in Full Council. This option would result in a reduction in Councillor Issues and a reduction in time for party business but would allow 30 minutes for resident participation. It was also discussed and agreed to recommend a change in how Councillor Issues were selected, dispensing with the current randomly generated system and instead inviting Group nominations to specify which Councillor led this each meeting. It was agreed that this would be for the Groups to determine how councillors were chosen. The Committee considered the importance of keeping any new arrangements under review and agreed an evaluation of them should take place in Spring 2024.
- 5.4 The Committee considered that the removal of the Future Policy Plan as a device for party business was appropriate and agreed that Groups should be allowed to select any policy or operational matter for debate provided it is relevant to the Council or city.
- 5.5 In terms of Outside Bodies, Members were in agreement that a new approach was required as the current list was significantly out of date. Updating the list would reduce the list of officially recognised Outside Bodies to which the Council made a corporate nomination to a much smaller, core group of bodies, and would tighten the criteria and process for accepting bodies on to this list in the future. Following discussions, it was agreed to retain Imperial College Court on the list of recognised outside bodies until further enquiries

on its status had been made. The Director of Law also suggested that any issues around the indemnity of members serving on an outside body would be explored further.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends to Council for approval of:

- 1) The introduction of a 30-minute public participation item at Full Council meetings in line with the headline proposals set out in section 4 of the report.
- 2) The amendment of the petitions scheme to support public participation at meetings of Full Council as set out in section 4 of the report.
- 3) Table 4 as set out in section 4 of the report detailing changes to meeting timings in the Full Council standing orders be adopted.
- 4) The selection of Councillor Issues to be in proportion to the sizes of Groups on the council and to remove the random selection of councillors for this item with this process replaced by nominations made by Groups.
- 5) The removal of the future policy plan as a device for selecting debates (and the accompanying requirement for a briefing note to be produced) and its replacement with a requirement for the Group proposing a subject for debate to give a short descriptive paragraph to frame the debate.
- 6) The delegation of authority to the Monitoring Officer to adopt such changes agreed by Full Council into the Constitution and to update and maintain supporting documents such as the Full Council Public Participation Protocol, including to make changes to public participation rules in consultation with Group Whips and Chair of the General Purposes Committee.
- 7) A review of the Public Participation Protocol be undertaken in Spring 2024.
- 8) The amendments to the scheme of Outside Bodies as set out at section 5 of the report, subject to Imperial College Court being retained on the list of recognised outside bodies.
- 9) The Director of Law to investigate further any issues around the indemnity of members serving on an outside body.

(Councillor Swaddle abstained from voting on recommendation 3.)

6 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2023-2024

- 6.1 The Committee received a report setting out that the Council was required, if it wished to pay such allowances, to adopt a Members' Allowances Scheme on an annual basis with effect from 1 April each year.
- 6.2 It was noted that currently, Westminster paid significantly lower allowances than other London boroughs. Therefore, in drawing up the new Members' Allowances Scheme the Committee considered several options in order to update the scheme. In drawing up the options regard had been given to the recommendations of the London-wide Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) convened by London Councils. The latest IRP report (January 2022) made recommendations based on roles as a percentage of the Leader's overall allowance (basic plus SRA). Currently the Leader and most other roles were substantially below where the IRP recommended and in addition the current scheme had significant structural anomalies within it in terms of the percentages applied to each role.
- 6.3 As such, the Committee acknowledged that Westminster's allowances scheme required updating to fix the significant structural and historical issues which currently beset it. Various options were explored setting out how the scheme could be amended.
- 6.4 In considering the proposals the Committee noted the views of both political parties of the council and following discussions the Committee agreed to recommend to Full Council Option 4 as the most appropriate method to update the scheme in this year. This option, as set out in the report, assumed a 4.04% uplift in the basic allowance but took a more targeted approach to increasing SRAs, focusing on those roles which were under most pressure or had unique characteristics in Westminster. The overall annual cost of this option would be £998,834, an increase of £69,802 on the current position. It was confirmed this was higher than the existing spend but within the budget currently available.
- 6.5 The Committee also discussed the allowances currently paid to Independent and co-opted members and suggested a future review of these takes place.
- 6.5 Separately, an amendment to the Dependents/Carers Allowance policy was proposed which would allow councillors who claim the allowance to do so for one hour either side of a defined duty. This was a change from half an hour either side and it was proposed in recognition of the fact that it may take Councillors more than half an hour to travel across the city, when allowing for a reasonable buffer time. The Committee considered it would not have a significant financial impact as the allowance was not claimed very often.

RESOLVED:

That Full Council:

- 1) Be recommended to approve the Member Allowances 2023-2024 Option 4 scheme, as set out in the report, with effect from 1 April 2023.

- 2) Be recommended to approve the amendment to the Dependents/Carers Allowance Policy as set out in Appendix B of the report.

(Councillor Swaddle voted against recommendation 1.)

The Meeting ended at 7.18pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____