

Title page - Annual Report of Policy and Scrutiny Activity in 2022-2023

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## Foreword



**Councillor Angela Piddock**  
**Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

It's been a turbulent year in national and local government. We have had changes of Prime Ministers, the death of a monarch and a new administration at Westminster City Council, all with the backdrop of a Cost-of-Living Crisis, ongoing conflict in Ukraine and periods of more extreme weather. In Westminster, the Council has been quick to react to national developments and proactive in pursuing its own ambitious plans as part of its Fairer Westminster agenda. The role of Policy and Scrutiny to hold the Executive, senior officers and partners to account is vital and allows Members to be a voice for Westminster residents and stakeholders.

I am pleased to present this report which contains a selection of highlights of the last year of Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster, from May 2022 to April 2023. Policy and Scrutiny Members have considered, investigated, reviewed, helped develop policies, and provided recommendations to improve the delivery of services and ensure that Westminster's commitments are being met. The wide range of topics and issues scrutinised throughout the year have provided opportunities to hold decision-makers, both inside and outside the Council, to account.

I am thrilled that Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster has been on, and is still on, a journey of improvement. We engaged the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny ("CfGS") to undertake a 'Scrutiny Improvement Review' which engaged with Members and officers alike to understand what works well with scrutiny at Westminster and in what areas we could take action to make scrutiny even more effective as an organisation. Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster had not been subject to an in-depth review for some time, and we were keen that the function meets the Council's high expectations and provides the most effective and impactful service it can for the benefit of our communities.

I am sure that the good work we have achieved this year will be built upon in the next municipal year and the journey to improvement will continue to ensure that Member-led scrutiny will play as full a role as possible in the Council as it can.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of the previous Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, Councillor Patricia McAllister, and Councillors who sat on Scrutiny this past year and commend them on their spirit of providing constructive challenge to the Executive, senior officers and partners to ensure that the Council provides the best service it can to its residents and stakeholders.

## Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster

Scrutiny is a vital function to promote transparency and local accountability as it allows a politically-balanced group of local non-Executive Councillors to hold the Council's Cabinet Members (Executive), senior officers and partners to account. Scrutiny should seek to do this by being a critical friend, supporting the Executive to deliver its priorities in the best way possible and holding public services accountable on behalf of Westminster's communities.

Westminster City Council has four Policy and Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Commission. Following the administration change at the local election in May 2022, Westminster's Policy and Scrutiny Committees were reorganised to mirror the new Cabinet Member portfolios.

In Westminster, the Policy and Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Commission not only examine the work of the Council and decisions that are made, they also actively contribute to developing policy by conducting research and making recommendations on how services can be improved.

The issues which the Policy and Scrutiny Committees choose to explore are evidence-based and can 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.

### Committee Structure

- Westminster Scrutiny Commission
- Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Finance, Planning and Economy Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee

As noted above, there are four Policy and Scrutiny Committees in addition to the Westminster Scrutiny Commission. The four subject specific Committees each scrutinise the policy areas related to Cabinet Member portfolios and those Cabinet Members have to report and provide information to their respective Committee upon request. Each Committee is led by a Chair and together, the Chairs of all the Committees sit on the Scrutiny Commission along with three Members of the Opposition Party. The Commission investigates issues that cut across the work areas of a number of committees and provides an opportunity for Councillors to question the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. It also enables the Chairs to have strategic oversight of the scrutiny function to ensure it is being effective and making an impact.

Each Committee typically meets six times per year, and it is up to the Chairs as to how each Committee conducts its business, with some preferring to focus on in-depth reviews of topical issues and others favouring broader analysis of a range of issues. Chairs can also call extraordinary meetings throughout the year to hold additional or dedicated sessions on key emerging issues, time-critical issues or to bring all stakeholders together to better understand and evaluate an issue.

It should be noted that Policy and Scrutiny Committees are not in themselves formal decision-making bodies but they are supported by legislation to hold the Executive and partner organisations to account. For example, a committee can request that Cabinet Members, senior officers and external partners attend before it to present information and answer questions. Following this the committee can make recommendations that have to be acknowledged, considered and responded to in due course. Recommendations are then typically tracked by committees until they are either implemented or satisfactory reasons are given for them not being acted upon.

### Task Groups and Single Member Studies

To develop policy and examine issues in more depth beyond formal meetings, committees can establish Councillor-led task groups. As part of this work, Councillors will often hear from expert witnesses, question key officers and Cabinet Members, consult with relevant stakeholders and conduct site visits. Depending on the subject matter and whether a rapid response or longer-term investigation is required, the work of a task group can take between four months and a year to complete which allows for a full investigation to be undertaken. Findings are then fed back to the Committee, or Committees, which established it and presented to the Cabinet Member or partner organisation for consideration.

An individual Member can also examine an issue in detail on behalf of the Committee, this is called a Single Member Study.

Last year, the Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission at the time made the decision not to establish any task groups in the first year of the new administration to allow scrutiny members to settle into their new roles. However, recognising that the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group is a standing task group, the work of this group was carried out. A summary of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, along with key findings and recommendations is set out below.

### Work Programmes

Policy and Scrutiny work programmes are drawn up to set the agendas for the committees over a municipal year. It is the Chair, alongside the committee Members, who consider and decide the focus of the work programmes. Work programmes are recognised as organic and flexible documents which can be amended at any time if important issues arise.

Work programmes for 2022/23 were drawn up based on work left over from the 2021/22 municipal year and the preceding electoral cycle. The change of political control at the May 2022 local elections necessitated a review of these work programmes as the priorities of the Executive, and therefore the Council, shifted quite fundamentally. The work programmes for this year were therefore developed over time and sometimes were subject to quite substantial change from one meeting to the next. This is something that is expected to settle down in future years as the Council now has a revised corporate strategy "Fairer Westminster" and the administration is beginning to make progress on its objectives.

The proposed work programmes for the Policy and Scrutiny Committees for the 2023/24 municipal year were drawn up at the end of the last municipal year. The process for this included; consultation with the Executive Members of the Council, with the Chief Executive,

Executive Directors and relevant Heads of Service, following up on items and commitments from previous meetings, consideration of forward plans in the Executive Member's portfolios and challenges identified across the Directorates. The aim of this process was to culminate in work programmes which focus on: what is important; areas where performance might be improved; services which are important to residents; where scrutiny can make a difference and add value; proactively feeds into policy development by contributing to pre-tender considerations or strategy development for example; and uses the insight of backbench councillors to act as critical friend to services of the City Council and our partners thereby enabling good governance and excellent services.

Please visit the webpage for the relevant committee to find upcoming agendas and work programmes. If you have a suggestion for a topic that affects a significant number of people in Westminster and could benefit from being scrutinised, please feel free to contact the team at [scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny2@westminster.gov.uk). Alternatively, if the issue is related to a specific case then it may be best to contact your local councillor.

### [Attending Policy and Scrutiny Meetings](#)

Formal committee meetings are open to members of the public who are warmly invited to attend and observe proceedings. Unless otherwise stated, formal committee meetings are broadcasted live from the committee webpage and usually held in City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP, 18<sup>th</sup> Floor, although we are keen to take scrutiny out of City Hall and into the community. Please visit the webpage for the relevant committee to find upcoming meeting dates and agendas. Other meetings, such as those of a Task Group are open to the public at the discretion of the relevant Chair.

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

### [Policy and Scrutiny for the Year Ahead](#)

At the time of writing, we say thank you and goodbye to Councillors Melvyn Caplan and Karen Scarborough who have moved on to other roles. We also bid farewell to our former Policy and Scrutiny Chair and Chair of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Patricia McAllister and welcome to Councillor Concia Albert, who will be Chairing the Committee going forward. We also welcome Councillors Lorraine Dean and Ed Pitt Ford who are joining the Policy and Scrutiny ranks.

Furthermore, as also detailed in Councillor Piddock's foreword, Policy and Scrutiny at Westminster is on a journey of improvement. The Improvement Review undertaken by CfGS will help to enable scrutiny at Westminster to be as effective and impactful as it can be for our residents and stakeholders. The review engaged with Members and officers alike and a feedback report written by CfGS will summarise the findings and propose areas to improve, through evidence-based recommendations. The findings of the review will initially be presented to the Scrutiny Commission from where Members and officers will be able to discuss and decide what changes to adopt and how to make scrutiny more effective. In the coming months, there will be Member and officer development workshops to explore findings and recommendations. The process will be Member-led as Members, with support from officers, will be expected to work on and deliver aspects of improvement.

Lastly, the Policy and Scrutiny Chairs and officer team will continue to engage with the London Scrutiny Network, having hosted the second meeting of the Network in April 2023 and looking forward to hosting the next in July as well as furthering engagement across not only London boroughs but nationally.

## Westminster Scrutiny Commission

### What does the Commission do?

The Westminster Scrutiny Commission (“the Commission”) is the overarching body which is responsible for the management and co-ordination of the Council’s Policy and Scrutiny function. The Members are Chairs of the respective committees, alongside three opposition representatives.

The Commission has a number of important roles in the operation of the Council. These include scrutinising Leader of the Council’s portfolio and with this taking a strategic look to examine cross-cutting Council programmes and areas of policy which are of key importance to how the Council supports its residents and businesses. The Commission also has oversight of the work programmes of all Policy and Scrutiny Committees and has the responsibility of resolving any issues identified in the delivery of their statutory duties.

### Membership (until May 2023)

Councillors Melvyn Caplan, Paul Fisher, Patricia McAllister (Chair), Angela Piddock, Rachael Robathan, Karen Scarborough and Jason Williams.

### Highlights from the year

The Commission met four times in the 2022/23 municipal year and received regular updates from the Leader of the Council on matters within his portfolio and from the Chief Executive who provided updates on matters of corporate interest. Through question and answer sessions with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, the Commission has reviewed progress on the Council’s key initiatives such as the ‘Westminster Against Dirty Money’ Charter and economic crime, raised issues around improving cost-of-living support for residents, and promoted the greater use of scrutiny in the Council’s Fairer Westminster delivery plan. In addition, the Commission received verbal updates from the Chairs of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees on the work of their committees since the last meeting of the Commission.

One of the biggest challenges to local authorities over the past municipal year has been the Cost-of Living Crisis. Westminster City Councillors approved a motion to declare a Cost-of-Living Emergency at a meeting of Full Council on 21 September 2022. During meetings of the Commission, the Leader and Chief Executive have responded to probing lines of questioning, of which the focus has included the emergency measures and whether funds are adequate, and that information is disseminated in the most efficient and effective way so that the most vulnerable residents, both in Westminster and placed out of borough, knew what support is available to them.

Alongside the high-profile issue of the Cost-of-Living Crisis, the Commission has been active in scrutinising and developing policy on a wide range of topics. One such topic was Emergency Preparedness Planning. One line of enquiry of particular importance was communication to

residents and stakeholders during a crisis, particularly considering the July 2021 floods where this was acknowledged as not being robust enough. The Commission also raised the possibility of emergency planning training for Councillors during crises and after; this was noted as an action and a session was held accordingly. Members decided that, considering the ever-changing environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Commission would receive a bi-annual report on the Council's Emergency Preparedness Planning.

The Commission also fed into policy development with regards to the Council's plans to increase community participation. There were many questions asked of the Executive Director of Innovation and Change, including: consistent and demographically diverse engagement across the whole borough, the balance between Councillors exercising their elected roles and residents exercising their constituent roles, managing expectations, standards of consultations, timelines of schemes, languages used and benchmarking. The Commission recognised that whilst community participation would usually be a topic for the Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee, the Commission had spoken a number of times about participatory budget setting and community participation in priority-setting. The Commission understood that there is a large amount of work to do to in the community participation space and that specific details in this topic will be picked up by the Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

The Commission also received an overview of the work of the Future of Westminster Commission ("FoWC"). The Commission investigated a number of areas under the FoWC including: engagement with officers across the Council, the scope of the different strands of the FoWC, priorities across the City, and holding public facing meetings. The focus of scrutiny over the coming year will be to examine the Council's response to the FoWC reviews and the decisions which are being taken by Cabinet Members. It is vital that the plans do not negatively impact upon the quality of service that residents and stakeholders receive which means it is crucial that these decisions are subject to extensive scrutiny. For this reason, each individual Policy and Scrutiny Committee will be scrutinising the Council's response to the FoWC reviews over the coming year.

This past year has been one where there has been a great focus on Westminster, with three major national events (Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III) happening within the space of a year, alongside the day-to-day running of the Council to provide services to residents and stakeholders. When presented with the Workforce Update item, which included details of high engagement scores from the staff 'Our Voice' survey, the Commission recognised that there has been a plethora of good work which has been undertaken to improve the workforce alongside high scores for the City Survey which highlights a correlation between delivery of world class services and being a world class employer. However, the Commission acknowledged that there are areas to improve in the workforce and suggested changes to the Our Voice staff survey questions, with the expectation that a workforce report will come back to the Commission next year.

## [Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)

### [What does the Committee do?](#)



The Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the broad range of important issues that make up the portfolio of the Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector and Children's Services and Young People, Learning and Leisure.

This Committee also has an important and external statutory duty which it must carry out in relation to public health and looks at the work of the NHS provider trusts including Imperial, Chelsea and Westminster, Central London Community Healthcare and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust. The committee also looks at the way the health service interacts jointly with our social care services, the voluntary sector, independent providers and other council services to provide better health services to meet the diverse needs of Westminster residents and improve their wellbeing. The Committee acts as a 'critical friend' by recommending ways that health-related services could be improved but also has a formal power to refer any variation in health services to the Secretary of State should they consider that the changes are inappropriate.

This Committee performs an important role around safeguarding matters for vulnerable adults and children, assuring that the Council's approach to such matters is of a high standard. Additionally, the committee has a remit which also includes education. The Council therefore has a duty to make sure that this Committee includes the following (non-voting) representatives in its membership: one Church of England diocese representative, one Roman Catholic diocese representative, two parent governor representatives, and two headteachers from local schools or academies.

#### Membership (until May 2023)

Councillors Iman Less, Tim Mitchell, Ellie Ormsby, Angela Piddock (Chair), Karen Scarborough, Selina Short and Max Sullivan. Co-opted Members: Alix Ascough, Marina Coleman, Mark Hewitt and Professor Ryan Nichol.

#### Highlights from the year

Over the 2022/23 municipal year, the Committee has considered a wide breadth of items. Particular highlights include the significant involvement and impact in the consultation for the proposed Orthopaedic In-Patient Surgery in North West London. This followed plans and recommendations made by Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust to improve orthopaedic in-patient surgery and care in North West London. Staff from the Trust attended a meeting of the Committee and Members submitted several recommendations that were taken forward. The key topics highlighted by the Committee and responded to were: the consultation process to date and feedback from service users, the community, and partners, the importance of a joined-up approach between patient care services across the borough, the current waiting lists for orthopaedic care and the issues with addressing the backlog of patients in the borough, the costs to patients in travelling for treatment and the plans to transport patients between services, vulnerable residents, and the complimentary, digital aspect of the service to improve communication with patients.

Discussions regarding the future of the Gordon Hospital are still in progress and the Chair and Committee have played an active role in these. Members of Central North West London NHS have attended Committee on two occasions and consultation is ongoing about the need for an inpatient mental health care offer for Westminster residents. As part of the overall scrutiny and consultation process, Members have sought further information regarding the quality

impact assessments that have been carried out, further data on the length of time it takes someone with acute mental health care needs to access a hospital bed, how partner, voluntary, and local emergency departments have been affected since the closure of the Gordon Hospital, and how these items are being monitored.

The Committee has also considered the Council's Children and Young People's plan for 2023 /2026, to ensure the Council can be held to account in delivering the required actions to achieve its priority outcomes and objectives for young people. It has also investigated the benefits of the internationally recognised and respected International Baccalaureate programme for young people, and in doing so, considered the academic outcomes that give students optimum choices in and outside of the UK, retention, and overall student engagement and success.

The Committee received updates at each meeting from Councillor Nafsika Butler-Thalassis and Councillor Tim Roca on matters concerning their portfolios. Additionally, the Committee has received written updates from partners such as Healthwatch, the Central North West London NHS, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ofsted.

As part of the scrutiny function and to ensure the Committee keep abreast of local interventions, site visits have been carried out in the community. Highlights include the Gordon Hospital, Crisis House in Paddington, and the Westminster Academy, where Members met with service users, on-site personnel, and officers. The Committee have found these visits to be of particular benefit in their understanding of matters that come to scrutiny and these visits will be continued in 2023/24.

#### [North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

The Chair of the Children, Adult Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Piddock, is a Member of the North West London Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee. This Committee meets with representatives of NHS North West London to discuss and consider matters concerning the NHS, its decision making process, and consultations. Over the course of the last year, Councillor Piddock has been involved in discussions regarding Integrated Care Systems (following the enactment of The Health and Care Act 2022), the Primary Care Strategy, GP accessibility, The Gordon Hospital, and the Palliative Care Review.

#### [Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)

##### [What does the Committee do?](#)

The Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member Climate Action, Regeneration and Renters and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services. Key policy areas and programmes within the remit of this committee include: housing management, housing associations and registered providers, the Housing Solutions Service (HSS), housing allocations, rough sleeping and homelessness, regeneration, community and environmental improvements and the Climate Emergency.

##### [Membership \(until May 2023\)](#)

Councillors Gillian Arrindell, Robert Eagleton, David Harvey, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Patricia McAllister (Chair), Alan Mendoza and Cara Sanquest.

### Highlights from the year

This Committee has focussed a significant part of its scrutiny work over the 2022/23 municipal year on topics associated with housing. A significant focus has been the Council's capital works programme in relation to housing. This has included how capital works can become more sustainable, how the Council is meeting its objectives, as well as the challenges of managing leaseholder bills against a backdrop of increasing labour and material costs.

The Committee have also considered the Climate Action Programme including, greenhouse gas emissions in Westminster, the existing Climate Emergency Action Plan for Westminster, the actions that have been delivered to date, and a timeline for reviewing the Action Plan to reflect the priorities of the new administration. Of particular focus to the Committee has been how the Council are actioning climate engagement activities, the Climate Emergency Programme, and the plans to engage Westminster residents and stakeholders in climate action through the use of a Citizens' Climate Assembly.

Included in the scrutiny of regeneration initiatives, the Committee has reviewed the ways in which the Council seeks to improve the environment in which our residents live on the Council's housing estates across the borough. This has included discussions on gardens and green spaces, recycling services, estate security, and community initiatives to aid cohesion and resident involvement.

The Ebury Bridge Regeneration Project came to scrutiny in December 2022 and the Committee carried out a site visit in October 2022, where Members viewed the plans for each phase of the project and heard from the developers, architects, and officers managing resident engagement. Of particular priority to the Committee has been the support provided to families and individuals impacted by the estate regeneration, how consultation and engagement is undertaken and how this compares to best practice across the regeneration sector, what these policies provide for residents throughout the process, how residents' concerns and complaints have been managed and whether these processes can be improved. There has also been a focus on the housing offer that will be available to Westminster residents on completion of the project, including new homes, and how this may assist the housing waiting lists. This has included topics such as the Council's approach to rehousing, acquisitions, valuations, and compensation. The Committee has also considered sustainability and the carbon position of the project and the future opportunities for residents to remain engaged post completion of the new estate.

Items that have been scrutinised by this Committee have also included recommendations for housing service improvement and measures that could be incorporated into the delivery to further support Westminster residents. Housing repairs, mechanical and electrical services and mould and condensation has been of particular focus due to the increasing demand and support that has been required in this economic environment. Concerns surrounding homelessness across the borough has brought the provision of temporary accommodation to this Committee. Members have reviewed the supply and demand for temporary accommodation how it is sourced, the standards delivered, and households supported. In particular, the Committee fed into discussions about how temporary accommodation can best be delivered in the future.

The Committee also received updates at each meeting from Councillor Matt Noble and Councillor Liza Begum concerning their portfolios.

## Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### What does the Committee do?

The Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection as well as the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality. Key policy areas and programmes within the remit of this Committee include: parks and open spaces, air quality, recycling, waste and street cleansing (collection and enforcement), highways, parking policy and enforcement, mortuaries, Parliament Square and communications unit, community protection services, police liaison and Integrated Gangs Unit, community engagement, diversity and inclusion, resident groups and local forums, the Ward Budget Programme and licensing policies.

### Membership (until May 2023)

Councillors Melvyn Caplan, Laila Cunningham, Iman Less, Mark Shearer, James Small-Edwards, Judith Southern and Jason Williams (Chair).

### Highlights from the year

In the municipal year 2022/23, the Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee covered a wide range of topics. The Committee takes responsibility for discharging the Council's statutory responsibilities under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006, to act as the Council's crime and disorder committee. As part of this, the Committee invited the temporary Chief Inspector of Central West BCU (Westminster Neighbourhood Teams and the Royal Parks) who took questions on protecting young people's safety in terms of stop and search, understanding ethnic disproportionality in arrest figures and an initial response to Baroness Casey's report in terms of how police in Westminster were addressing the findings.

In addition to this, the Committee received a report on the severe flooding in Westminster in 2021 and the ensuing report by Thames Water. This led to recommendations for the Cabinet Member to consider, providing insight that he had not been aware of and committed to taking to Thames Water in his discussions with them. Another item of note was examining the award of the waste service contract, following officer and legal recommendations. The Committee gave comment to the officer recommendations and analysed current offering and what needed to be changed to make the contract tender process even more competitive in the future.

In the past year, the strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour was released and this Committee had the opportunity to review the draft strategy and give steer on how the final consultation could be most effective. As part of this discussion, Members questioned the length of the proposed consultation and suggested an easy-read version be produced. In terms of the strategy itself Members gave comment on the mental health offering, the focus of priorities, the need for after-care and highlighted the need for a concerted effort to improve existing relationships with the police and mental health services.

The Committee also took substantive looks at the electrification of gas street lighting, environmental enforcement, options for a parking review, food safety and ratings and a six month review of the waste action squad.

The Committee received regular updates from the Cabinet member for Communities and Public Protection, Cllr Aicha Less as well as the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality, Cllr Paul Dimoldenberg on priorities and updates within their respective portfolios. These updates covered almost everything within the portfolio, however, routinely questions arose over issues relating to dockless bike parking, fly-tipping, gaslights, cycle lanes, pedicabs, city inspectors, night time safety for women and street entertainment policy.

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

### What does the Committee do?

The Finance, Planning and Economic Development Committee scrutinises work that falls within the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development. Key policy areas and programmes within the remit of this committee include: economic development, employment, town planning, planning policy and place-shaping, Smart City programme, broadband and digital innovation in the public realm, finance, the Corporate Property portfolio, Capital Programme, procurement, customer services, legal and the council's digital services.

### Membership (until May 2023)

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

### Highlights from the year

In the municipal year 2022/23, the Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee met five rather than six times due to a lack of business for the scheduled meeting in December. However, the Committee still covered a number of unique substantive topics over the remaining five meetings.

The Committee was used as a forum for the publication and scrutiny of issues relating to the Cooke report into the Oxford Street District Programme. This was an important opportunity for Members to scrutinise a sensitive subject which was connected to a controversial project. The Chief Executive, Stuart Love, also attended to respond to Member questions which were as a whole carefully considered and effective. Members were given the chance to ensure lessons the Chief Executive, and by extension the Council, had been learnt from the Programme, in terms of managing escalating costs, procurement exercises, hiring of external contractors, senior accountability and more generally the wider working culture at Westminster City Council.

The Committee was also given the opportunity to provide a steer to the ongoing review into the Council's 'Report It' function which allows residents to report issues they experience. Several recommendations were offered by the Committee, such as caution over misleading wording and ensuring that the final product does not include unnecessary vernacular that a typical resident may not be familiar with. The Committee also received a paper referencing the impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had on Council finances and the ongoing effect this continued to have. Members sought assurance that the Council was adequately prepared for any future 'black-swan' events and how the Council could better protect itself from these shocks in terms of pre-agreed contracts.

The Committee also took substantive looks at the how the Community Infrastructure Levy works and can be used to support community priorities, the Smart City programme, new Oxford Street Programme and understanding how neighbourhood planning can facilitate better outcomes by supporting neighbourhood forums better.

The Committee received regular updates from the Cabinet member for Finance and Council Reform, Councillor David Boothroyd as well as the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, Committee Geoff Barraclough on priorities and updates within their respective portfolios. These updates covered almost everything within the portfolio, however, routine questions came over issues relating to Council Tax collection, macroeconomic pressures, cost of living support, drop-off in major planning applications, place-shaping schemes and the scope for Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

In April 2023, the Committee were invited to the launch of the Responsible Procurement Strategy at the Grand Junction.

## Task Groups

As already mentioned, a decision was made by the Chair of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission to allow scrutiny Members to settle into their new roles before establishing new task groups; the exception to this was the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group.

### Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Budget Scrutiny Task Group (“BSTG”) is a standing task group that meets every year to scrutinise the proposed annual Budget. The BSTG has the following terms of reference: *to consider, on behalf of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees, budget options and draft business plans and estimates at the appropriate stages in the business planning cycle and to submit recommendations/ comments to the cabinet and/or cabinet members.* Cabinet must take into account and give due regard to any views and recommendations from the BSTG in drawing up firm budget proposals for submission to the Council. The report to Council must reflect those comments (and those of other task groups and committees, if any) as well as the Cabinet’s response.

The budget scrutiny process this year was of particular importance being the first draft Budget since the local elections in May 2022 and reflecting the priorities of a new administration. The membership of the BSTG in January 2023 was made up of 11 Councillors, with four Majority Group representatives and three Opposition Group representatives attending each of the three sessions. Councillors were able to bring their full range of professional expertise and local government experience to the deliberations which enabled a diverse range of cross-party questions and facilitated a robust interrogation of the draft Budget.

The Chair of the BSTG commended the significant investment of time and energy by officers from all directorates that went into compiling the reports and Equality Impact Assessments, answering Members’ questions and following up on requests. The BSTG this year increased the transparency of the scrutiny process by choosing to livestream all the sessions on the Council website and by inviting members of the public to sit in the public gallery. Additionally, with help from the Council’s Communications team, the Chair commissioned a video which explained what the BSTG is and how residents can view the proceedings.

The BSTG determined that the proposed Budget was financially robust with the potential to deliver on the strategic ambitions being pursued by the new administration. However, there were a number of risk areas in the draft Budget that the BSTG highlighted for future monitoring over the year ahead and which were reported to Cabinet to consider. Some of these risks may also be issues the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committees wish to consider in greater depth in due course. Risks included: the Pimlico District Heating Unit, Council Tax freeze, Housing Revenue Account, Oxford Street Programme, borrowing requirements, Minimum Income Guarantee, parking charges, the Future of Westminster Commission, the fall in Major Planning Applications, Temporary Accommodation, funding grants for schools, and Westminster Builds.

Notwithstanding however, there were a number of positive features also noted regarding the Council's overall financial strategy, including: digital innovation, contingencies, returns, planned preventative maintenance, Regent Street funding, City Hall rent, "Electrification", Children's Services, additional stock condition surveys and savings. There are ongoing discussions about the future of the BSTG and what improvements can be made to ensure it is an effective tool to scrutinise the draft Budget each year. There are a number of opportunities which can be examined as part of this, which include: transparency, participatory budgeting, Cabinet Member participation, an increased number of sessions, and improved presentation of materials.

### Reporting use of Special Urgency and General Exception Procedures

Special Urgency procedures have been deployed once in the 2022-23 municipal year.

The City Council's Constitution sets out, under Article 33.12 (Access to Information), that 28 days' notice must be given where the Cabinet, a Cabinet Committee, an individual Cabinet Member or Officer intends to make a Key Decision. Where the provision of such notice is impracticable the Constitution provides both General Exception and Special Urgency provisions. The General Exception provisions require, amongst other things, a period of five clear working days' notice to be given. Where compliance with the General Exception principle is impractical the decision can be taken under Special Urgency provisions.

Cases of Special Urgency can only proceed where the decision maker has obtained agreement that the making of the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be delayed from: (a) the Chairman of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee; or (b) if there is no such person, or if they are unable to act, the Lord Mayor.

During the municipal year, 2022/23, the provision of Special Urgency was used once to facilitate an urgent decision, entitled 'Direct Award of Travel Care contracts for Children and Adults'. The reason for Special Urgency was an unforeseen situation where the provider withdrew and continuity of this statutory service needed to be maintained.

In this single case of Special Urgency provision being used in 2022/23, the approval of the Chair of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee was given. This approval was given by Councillor Angela Piddock, Chair of the Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee, who agreed to the use of Special Urgency provisions on 11 August 2022.

In accordance with statutory and Constitutional requirements, following the approval of the Chair of Policy and Scrutiny Committee, two notices were published. The first detailing that

the decision would be taken under Special Urgency and the second was a use of General Exception provisions, stating the decision had been made and including the report upon which the decision was based.

### Reporting use of Call-in

One decision was called-in in the 2022/23 municipal year.

Under provision 19.16 of the Call-in procedures in the Constitution, when a decision is made by the Executive, or a key decision is made by an officer with delegated authority from the Cabinet, or under joint arrangements, the decision shall be published. All the Members of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee(s) and all relevant ward Councillors will be sent copies of the report at the time of issue. That notice will bear the date on which it is published and will specify that the decision will come into force, and may then be implemented at 5pm on the fifth working day after the publication of the decision. However, if, during this period, the Proper Officer shall call-in a decision for scrutiny, or the Committee if so requested by any three Members of the Committee entitled to vote on the subject matter of the decision and/or, in relation to a decision affecting a single ward by all three members of that ward, the Proper Officer shall then notify the decision-taker of the call-in.

On behalf of the Chief Executive, who is the Proper Officer for call-ins, a meeting of the Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee was summoned to vote on and scrutinise the decision of Councillors Noble and Boothroyd titled 'Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position'. As set out in the Constitution, the meeting was convened within, or as reasonably practical thereafter, 10 working days and held on Wednesday 8 February 2023.

As this was a joint decision between Councillors Noble and Boothroyd, both Members were invited to the meeting but Councillor Noble led discussions as the reasons given for the call-in were primarily of regeneration-relation not finance-relation but also because the decision was called-in by Members of the Climate Action, Housing Regeneration and Renters Policy and Scrutiny Committee, not the Finance, Planning and Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillors Harvey, Mendoza and Hitchcock called-in the titled 'Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position' decision for the reasons below.

"Homes for Intermediate rent – It will be a crushing disappointment to the people who work in Westminster, and thus make it what it is, that their life options will be limited by the huge reduction in intermediate rental homes from 126 to 21. This means that 105 local people and families who had hoped to live in Pimlico so that they could work locally will no longer have a chance. Out of a total of 781 homes, fewer than three in every hundred, will go to people who serve this City and might qualify for intermediate affordable homes. Surely, with Mayoral funding it would be possible to build more social homes without making it even more difficult for the teacher, the office worker, vet assistant, council worker, nurse, or skilled SME worker to live in Westminster so sustaining an inclusive community?

Segregation of tenures – we thought that people coming together to live next door to each other on the Ebury estate will be able to do just that. But instead, a decision has been made to separate social, intermediate and market homes. To paraphrase Aneurin Bevan, where the



council is building homes, the home owner, the private renter, and the social housing tenant should all live in the same street for social cohesion.”

At the call-in meeting, Committee Members moved to a formal vote where there were two options presented: to take no further action or to refer the decision back to the decision-makers. If a majority of Committee Members vote to take no further action, the decision would stand. If a majority of Members vote to refer the decision back to the decision-makers, the decision would be reconsidered within 10 working days, or as soon as possible thereafter, to either amend the decision or not, adopting a final decision. Committee Members raised their hands to indicate their decision and the Statutory Scrutiny Officer recorded the result of the vote which was to take no further action (four for: three against).

### Thanks and Further Information

The Policy and Scrutiny Committee Chairs 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 Chairs 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.

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).

The work programme for the year 2022/23 for each Policy and Scrutiny Committee is shown in Appendix 1, attached.

## Appendix 1 - Policy and Scrutiny Work Programmes for the 2022-23 municipal year

### Westminster Scrutiny Commission

- Future of Westminster Commission
- Emergency Preparedness Planning
- Community Participation
- Workforce Update

### Children, Adults, Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Annual Youth Justice Plan
- Out of School Provision
- The Gordon Hospital
- Care Coordination Solution
- Orthopaedic In-Patient Surgery in Northwest London
- 2023-2026 Children and Young People's Plan
- Adult Safeguarding
- Local Safeguarding Children Partnership 2021-2022
- Westminster Academy and the International Baccalaureate
- The Adult Pathway into Mental Health Services

### Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Climate Action Programme
- Repairs, Mechanical and Electrical Services
- Management of Housing Capital Programme
- Communal, Community and Environmental Improvements
- Support for Communities throughout the Estate Regeneration Process
- Decision of Ebury Estate Renewal: Delivery Strategy and Viability Position
- Provision of Temporary Accommodation to meet needs of Homeless Households
- Pimlico Strategic Options

### Communities, City Management and Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee

- Environmental Enforcement
- Policing in the City of Westminster
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy Consultation
- Parking Service
- Flooding
- Food Safety and Ratings
- Waste Action Squad
- Waste Service Contracts

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

- Community Infrastructure Levy
- Smart City Programme
- Oxford Street District Programme
- Ongoing effects of Covid-19 on Council Finances
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Report-It