

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 10 MARCH 2009

**ROOM M71, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Asad (Chair)
Councillor Waiseul Islam
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor David Snowdon
Councillor Bill Turner (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Salim Ullah (Deputising for Councillor Shiria Khatun)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Ohid Ahmed
Councillor Clair Hawkins
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Lutfur Rahman

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr Ahbab Miah – (Parent Governor Representative)
Mr H Mueenuddin – Muslim Community Representative
Mr Abdur Rouf – (Parent Governor Representative)

Officers Present:

Lutfur Ali – (Assistant Chief Executive)
Aman Dalvi – (Corporate Director, Development & Renewal)
David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services (Community))
Afazul Hoque – (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager)
Jebin Syeda – (Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Anthony Walters – (Interim Service Head Strategy, Partnership and Performance, Children's Services)
Owen Whalley – (Service Head, Major Project Development)
Beverley McKenzie –
Amanda Thompson – (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed Mr Abdur Rouf and Mr Ahbab Miah, the two recently appointed Parent Governor Co-opted Members, to their first meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephanie Eaton, Ahmed Hussain and Shiria Khatun.

Councillors Peter Golds and Salim Ullah were present as substitutes for Councillors Hussain and Khatun.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

Councillor Oliur Rahman stated that he had given apologies for absence prior to the last meeting and asked that this be correctly recorded.

Councillor Golds and Councillor Snowden asked that it be recorded that they had not agreed to support the budget as recorded in minute 7.1 (General Fund Budget Requirement & Council Tax 2009/10).

RESOLVED

That the minutes be adopted with inclusion of Councillor Rahman's apologies.

5. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None.

6. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

None.

7. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section One reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 11 February,

8. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT - LEAD MEMBER

Councillor Ohid Ahmed Lead Member of Regeneration, Localisation and Community Partnerships opened his presentation by giving a brief overview of what his Portfolio entailed, in particular highlighting the areas of local regeneration such as Bishop's Square, Roman Road Town Centre, Blackwall Reach and the Ocean Estate.

Key project aims included the demolition and redevelopment of 1600 new homes at Blackwall Reach and Robin Hood Gardens, 35% of which would be affordable housing, and 771 new homes and 1229 refurbished local authority homes on the Ocean Estate.

The Committee noted that the remodelling of the Community Plan and Local Area which had been identified as challenges the previous year were now achievements as the new Community Plan had been written and published, 35 new LAA targets had been agreed through the Partnership, and the new LAP Steering Groups had been successfully recruited to.

The Committee were also informed of achievements in relation to community engagement, consultation and empowerment, strategic and regeneration partnerships, business liaison and partnership, business tourism and community cohesion.

Members of the Committee asked questions regarding community cohesion, the recruitment of the Roman Road Town Centre Co-ordinator, affordable homes targets, and the roles of the Thames Gateway Development Corporation and Partnership.

The Chair thanked Councillor Ahmed for his presentation and for providing responses to the questions raised by the Committee.

9. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

9.1 Children and Young People's Plan 2009-12

Councillor Clair Hawkins, Lead member for Children's Services, presented the draft 3-year Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2009-12 which was required to be published in April 2009.

The Committee noted that the new CYPP was different to previous plans as it was shorter and more focused on key priorities, and it outlined what was going to be done differently in order to address these. Three new cross-cutting themes had been identified which ran throughout the plan, these were tackling child poverty, engaging the community and supporting families.

Arising from the discussion the Committee

RESOLVED

That the following comments on the draft CYPP 2009-12 be submitted to Cabinet:

- 1) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcome the Children and Young People's Plan 2009-12, and would like to thank the Lead Member and Officers for the extensive work that has gone into developing the plan. It is noted that this is a partnership document and consultation has taken place with all the stakeholders and young people and their families.
- 2) The Committee feel that there are a number of issues that the Cabinet should consider before endorsing the plan, including the need to be more explicit about how to tackle bullying especially homophobic bullying, and about the support available for 11-13 year olds which is a very important time of transition for young people.
- 3) The Committee have concerns about inter-generational worklessness and feel that the Plan should outline how this problem is being addressed and how young people are supported to be successful.
- 4) The Committee consider that the Olympics will provide a great opportunity for the Borough's young people to take an active part and the Council need to ensure this opportunity is maximised.

10. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

10.1 Members Enquiries

Councillor Sirajul Islam, Deputy Leader of the Council, introduced a report updating the Committee on further progress in finalizing the Members' Enquiries Business Process Improvement (BPI) project, and setting out current performance data in relation to Members' Enquiries.

The Committee noted that there had been an improvement in both quality and speed of response, with Council directorates presently achieving the target of 85% of enquiries responded to within 10 working days. Many of the milestones within the project had now been completed and attention was now focused on sustaining the improvement in response time, continued improvement, measuring the quality of responses and working with external bodies that had not yet achieved the target.

In response to questions, Beverley McKenzie, Members Support Manager, advised that the Council was still working very hard with the Housing Associations and they had been written to and urged to improve by the Chief Executive. Often their responses were not very satisfactory even when they were received and the quality needed improving.

The difficulties encountered by Members trying to deal with NHS issues were also recognised, and pressure would need to be applied in the same way as the Housing Associations.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the current activities and progress made in the Members' Enquiries Business Process Improvement project and the move to continuous improvement be noted;
- 2) That the improvement in timeliness of responding to Members' Enquiries and the success of all Council departments achieving the performance target of 85% be noted; and
- 3) That a vote of thanks be expressed to the Members Support Team for all their hard work.

10.2 Strategic Plan Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report 2008-09 (3rd Quarter)

Councillor Josh Peck, Lead Member for Resources and Performance, presented the combined service and financial performance report which covered the authority's progress against the actions in the Strategic Plan, key performance indicators and the overall financial position to the end of December 2008 (Quarter 3).

Councillor Peck highlighted the projected underspend of £2.328m for the authority on the General Fund revenue budget for the current financial year, and the improvements in the average waiting time for calls to Hot Lines to be answered and for benefits claims to be notified.

Councillor Anne Jackson expressed concern that data was not yet available for the percentage of vulnerable people either achieving or being supported to achieve independent living and this was a priority indicator. Councillor Peck undertook to report back on this.

RESOLVED

That the performance information set out in the report be noted.

11. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

11.1 Overview and Scrutiny Recommendation Tracking Report

The Chair introduced the report which provided an update on the scrutiny review recommendations undertaken over the last two years.

Overall services were implementing the majority of the recommendations and outcomes and ongoing work streams were in line with the spirit of the original recommendations. Of the 18 action plans being monitored, 11 were at green with 7 currently at yellow, six of which were due to the action plans only being agreed by the Cabinet recently.

The Chair advised that for the next year it was proposed that the Scrutiny Leads would meet with the relevant service to discuss a particular review and then provide an update to the Committee on the progress of those within their portfolios.

In respect of the scrutiny review concerning the determination of major planning applications, Councillor Ann Jackson advised that there were still many residents that were dissatisfied with the consultation process in relation to these, and the Council needed to be more proactive in increasing public awareness of what was going on.

Councillor Oliur Rahman expressed his thanks to the Scrutiny Team for all the support provided to Members when undertaking the reviews, and also asked for a breakdown of the nature of anti-social behaviour which was often wrongly just associated with young people.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

12. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) CABINET PAPERS

The Chair **moved** and it was **RESOLVED**

That the following pre-decision questions be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:

Agenda Item 6.1 Review of Local Land Charges Search Fees (CAB 128/089)

1. Are the prices fixed by legislation or can the Council set their own and can we keep our prices for priority searches to £200 and increase other areas to £155 per search?

Agenda Item 7.2 Results of the Consultation on the 2010/11 Admission Arrangements for Tower Hamlets Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools (CAB 131/089)

1. As only 2 school governors responded to the consultation can the Cabinet outline how they will change the consultation process to

ensure we have a more comprehensive involvement of school governors on this important issue?

2. Can the Council be proactive and introduce a mandatory admission for all 3 + years in nursery through this new admission scheme?
3. How will the new admission arrangements deal with the following:
 - Large increase in the population of young people in LAP 5 and 6 over the next 10 years:
 - The increase in the development of high rise buildings with families living in those and the demand on local schools from residents living in those

Agenda Item 10.1 Local Area Agreement (LAA) Refresh (CAB 132/089)

1. The Partnership is seeking to review targets relating to housing delivery due to the economic downturn. Can the Cabinet outline what they are planning to do to reduce overcrowding and build more family sized homes through this agreement?

Agenda Item 10.2 Future of Out of Hours Telephone Service

1. Out of the 60,000 calls received in year 2007/08 how many of them were from RSL properties and how many from the council owned properties?
2. As most of the RSLs use the Council's out of hour services how much were their contribution towards the cost and how much is the cost of providing this service for them?

Agenda Item 10.3 Award of Benefits Resilience Contract (CAB 134/089)

1. Will the Cabinet agree to receive six monthly or annual review of the contract before extending the contract and use performance data from the last 3 years to benchmark against future performance?
2. Is this a gateway for the council to eventually outsource its core service of dealing with benefits?
3. Can the Cabinet provide more credible evidence which shows that the proposed contract will bring savings of £1.7m pa?
4. There are more than 30 organisations in the borough that deal with benefit claims; can the Cabinet create a local consortium to provide this service?
5. Will the Cabinet ensure the tendered organisation aspires to the Council's equal pay and workforce to reflect the community policies?

