

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.45 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 21 JUNE 2017

**ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Denise Jones (Chair)

Councillor Rajib Ahmed (Substitute for
Councillor Clare Harrisson)
Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Ayas Miah
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Dr Phillip Rice	Church of England Representative
Fatiha Kassouri	Parent Governors
Shabbir Chowdhury	Parent Governors
Christine Trumper	Parent Governors

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor David Edgar	Cabinet Member for Resources
Councillor Sirajul Islam	Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing

Apologies:

Asad M Jaman Councillor Clare Harrisson	Muslim Faith Community
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Officers Present:

Mark Baigent	Interim Divisional Director, Housing and Regeneration
Janet Fasan	Divisional Director, Legal
Sharon Godman	Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Partnerships
David Knight	Principal Committee Services Officer

Neville Murton

Divisional Director, Finance,
Procurement & Audit

Peter Quirk

Senior Strategy, Policy & Performance
Officer

Philip Wadsworth

Plan Making Team Leader

Robert Wingate

Complaints & Information Officer, Legal
Services, Chief Executive's

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest.

2. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29th March, 2017 and 26th April were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

5. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

5.1 Budget Proposals

The Committee received a presentation from Councilor David Edgar – Cabinet Member for Resources and Neville Murton - Service Head of Finance and Procurement highlighting a number of key issues including Smarter Together which is the name for the LBTH transformation programme that will fundamentally change the way the Council works, providing an opportunity to rethink and create the right service models, skills and tools to get the best outcomes for residents; the Whilst the Workforce Strategy has been designed to articulate the Councils vision and blueprint to ensure LBTH has the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time for the right price;. The Digital Strategy providing the context and framework for the digital transformation of the Council and empowering customers with greater access to complete 80% of their transactions online; and the Benefits and Third Sector Team which is at the forefront of welfare reform proving support, advice and guidance to residents.

This was followed by questions and comments from Members which is summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the Mayor and Cabinet Member for Resources both appreciated the support provided by the Committee and welcomed their views on how they would wish to consider those issues;
- Asked for details on the Councils spend in agency workers. In response it was that the intention was to reduce the use of such workers although it was noted that they do provide the Authority with a valuable and flexible resource;
- Requested information on what is being done to help small business address the challenges they are facing with the new taxes now to be paid on non-residential properties. In response it was noted that it is accepted that help must be provided to businesses and going forward work is being undertaken to promote economic growth **e.g.** helping those businesses in significant need and require time to adjust to the increases in their rates;
- Wanted to know what is being done to help those on low incomes and who may be eligible for a council tax reduction of up to 100%;
- Wanted to be informed what is being done to ensure that the Boroughs IT infrastructure has the desired stability;
- Wished to be advised as to what is being done to help those self-employed workers on housing benefit. In response it was noted that work was being to help those with a low income who may be able to get Housing Benefit dependent on their self-employed earnings and any other earnings and benefits that they may receive.
- Wanted to be kept advised of what being done to support the long term development of the Boroughs infrastructure. In reply the Committee was informed that the infrastructure spend under constant review;
- Noted the need to monitor the impact of savings on the delivery of services and the plans for growth;
- Expressed concern that apparently there were those in the Borough either on low incomes or who were currently claiming benefits who were unaware that they might be able to apply to have their Council Tax reduced by up to 100%;

In conclusion, it was noted that the Executive were keen to be challenged on any of the issues referred to tonight and to discuss directly with the elected members who had specific issues that needed to be addressed and suggestions on how these might be resolved **e.g.** Council Tax and Business Rates.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Appointment of Scrutiny Vice-Chair; Lead Members, Co-options to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Establishment of Sub-Committees

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) received a report that:

- Asked for agreement on the Scrutiny Lead Members based on the Council's Directorates; and
- Asked Members to note the co-opted members of OSC in accordance with legislation.

As a result of a full and wide ranging discussion on the recommendations' contained in the report OSC

1. Agreed that it wished to continue to operate Scrutiny Leads with specific portfolios and appointed the following Lead Scrutiny Members:

Lead for Health, Adults & Community	Claire Harrison
Lead for Lead for Governance	Ayas Miah
Lead for Children's Services	Danny Hassell
Lead for Place	Helal Uddin
Lead for Resources	Ansar Mustaquim

2. Noted the co-option to the membership of the OSC of representatives in respect of education matters, as set out below:

Church of England Diocese representative	Dr Phillip Rice
Roman Catholic Diocese representative	Nomination is awaited
Parent Governor Representative	Shabbir Chowdhury
Parent Governor Representative	Fatiha Kassouri
Parent Governor Representative	Christine Trumper
Muslim Community Representative (non-voting)	Asad M Jaman

3. The Housing; Health and Grants Sub-Committees be established with the Membership as set out in **Appendix 1** of the report and that the following Councillors are appointed to Chair these Sub-Committees:

Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee	Helal Uddin
Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee	Claire Harrison
Grants Sub-Committee	Ansar Mustaquim

(Subsequent to the meeting the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, Councillor Denise Jones, has raised with the Monitoring Officer her concerns over the appointments to Lead Members. She has stated that, for a number of reasons, there was significant confusion during that item of business and that the decisions taken was therefore

not sound. The Monitoring Officer has agreed to void those decisions and to instruct the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to reconsider those decisions at its 20th of July 2017 meeting. Although the decisions made at the last meeting to establish and appoint Members to the Sub-Committees are still valid. The Committee therefore have before them a new report to allow for the opportunity to retake the decisions).

6.2 Complaints and Information Half Year Report 2016/17

The Committee was informed that the Council receives an annual report on its complaints handling and information requests and also a briefer half year update. It was noted that this report accounts for the half year period 1 April 2016 to 31 October 2016. In addition, whilst the Council's escalation in the internal process and to external regulators including the Information Commissioner and the Local Government and Housing Ombudsmen are low, response rates could be improved in all areas of complaints and information requests. The Committee was also advised that a focus on quality is a key component of achieving a more streamlined 2 stage Corporate Complaints procedure and, although it was not addressed specifically within this report, this focus will it was noted would drive an improvement across the processes.

The questions and comments from Members are summarised as follows.

The Committee:

- Noted that the total for the half year shows a 16% decrease in volume of escalated complaints and this is reflected across the directorates. Resources had the greatest fall in volume (40%) followed by the former Communities, Localities and Culture Directorate with a 21% fall to 72 from 91 in the previous period. The total percentage of complaints closed in time remained at 76% over both periods. With the exception of Tower Hamlets Homes the general direction of complaints upheld or partially upheld has fallen with Place only upholding or partially upholding 5% compared to 30% in the previous period;
- Wanted to know if the complaints process was used to identify areas of concern and in response noted that if a pattern was identified then the service area would be identified;
- Noted that the Statutory complaint's procedure allows for one stage of investigation only, although the form this takes is agreed in the light of those issues raised;
- Noted that a variety of methods have been used to resolve complaints e.g. round table meetings; formal interview and file reviews, and liaison between the Service Manager and the complainant;
- Noted that the key to resolving matters has been the emphasis on identifying a resolution plan with the complainant;
- Also was informed how complaints are addressed is under regular review as part of the process to help services areas improve their delivery;
- Queried if residents were properly advised on how to make a challenge against a Penalty Charge Notice once it has been issued. In reply it was noted that a significant number of complaints were received about parking restrictions and how to get parking permits.

In conclusion, it was noted that the Committee indicated that it would like to consider further the inclusion of the complaints handling process within the Scrutiny Annual Work Plan.

6.3 Local Plan

The Committee received and noted a progress report on the Local Plan and was advised that since the end of 2015, the Government has launched a number important changes to reform the current planning system. This has had significant implications to the preparation of the new Local Plan.

It was noted that the national planning policy places Local Plans at the heart of the planning system, so it is essential that they are in place and kept up to date. Local Plans set out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as a basis for safeguarding the environment, adapting to climate change and securing good design. They are also a critical tool in guiding decisions about individual development proposals, as Local Plans are the starting-point for considering whether applications can be approved.

The questions and comments from Members on the presentation are summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Was advised that the Local Plans should be tailored to the needs of each area in terms of their strategy and the policies required. They should focus on the key issues that need to be addressed and be aspirational but realistic in what they propose;
- Noted that the Local Plan should aim to meet the objectively assessed development and infrastructure needs of the area, including unmet needs of neighbouring areas where this is consistent with policies in the National Planning Policy Framework as a whole. Local Plans should recognise the contribution that Neighbourhood Plans can make in planning to meet development and infrastructure needs;
- Noted that local planning authorities should ensure that the policies in their Local Plan recognise the diverse types of housing needed in their area and, where appropriate, identify specific sites for all types of housing to meet their anticipated housing requirement;
- Was informed that this could include sites for older people's housing including accessible mainstream housing such as bungalows and step-free apartments, sheltered or extra care housing, retirement housing and residential care homes;
- Commented that it wished to see a copy of the Local Plan at the earliest possible opportunity;
- Noted it is intended to engage as many as possible in the process around the development of the Local Plan;

- Expressed concern that the Local Plan needs to consider the clusters of betting shops that are changing the character and appeal of the traditional retail centres. In response it was noted that the proliferation of betting shops was to be addressed in the Local Plan; and
- Wanted the Plan to consider the role that the planning regulations can play in ensure that materials used in the design; construction and refurbishment of tall buildings is managed to address those concerns raised by the tragedy of Grenfell Tower. In response it was noted that in developing the Local Plan consideration had already been given to the design; construction and refurbishment of both tall and medium rise buildings.

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Noted that the Scrutiny Lead for Governance, Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim as part of his work programme in the last municipal Year agreed to Chair a scrutiny challenge session. The aim of this session had been to consider the implications of the national review by Dame Louise Casey on opportunity and integration, in the Borough. It was noted the outcome of that challenge session would be published shortly.

8. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The Chair asked the Committee to submit any pre decision scrutiny of the unrestricted Cabinet papers prior to the 27th June, 2017 meeting.

(The submitted pre-decision scrutiny questions of the unrestricted Cabinet papers for the 27th June, 2017 meeting are attached at **Appendix 1**).

9. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

9.1 Fire Safety in Tower Hamlets

It was noted that Councillor Jones the Committee Chair had requested that the OSC Members should be provided with an update as an urgent item at this meeting on fire safety in Tower Hamlets.

Accordingly, the Chair invited Councillor Sirajul Islam Statutory Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Housing to advise the Committee on those actions taken in Tower Hamlets following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington.

The questions and comments from Members on the update are summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that a letter from Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) has been posted on their [web-site](#) to provide some reassurance to residents. This letter

would also be hand delivered to all residents living in flats over the coming days;

- Noted that Neighbourhood Housing Officers had been asked to be visible presence so that they can answer the questions that residents might have;
- Noted that as the cause of the fire was at present unknown the advice from the London Fire Brigade for people living in purpose built flats remains unchanged and is available on their [web site](#);
- Suggested that the Council should use some of its powers (i.e. through Building Control and Environmental Health) to ensure that all housing providers and businesses complied with fire safety requirements; and
- Also questioned the level of support that the Council is currently providing to those affected by the incident in Kensington along with the detail of the mutual aid provided to Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

In conclusion, the Chair confirmed that the Committee would like to have a further update at the next meeting and would like to be informed on the approach being to be taken by the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee in relation to scrutiny of the arrangements in the Borough pertaining to fire safety Accordingly, it was suggested that the Committee should carry out a review of the Council's Emergency Preparedness and Civil Contingency arrangements.

9.2 Children's Services Improvement - Update

The Committee received an update from Councillor Danny Hassell on the Children's Services Improvement Plan and noted that there had been an analysis of the situation within Children's Social Care. This 'diagnosis' has now been agreed by the Children's Improvement Board and Ofsted will look at whether they consider this is sufficient in terms of recognising the problems and failings. This has been reported by way of an introduction to the summary improvement document to the Best Value Improvement Board.

Following this diagnosis, it was noted that a thorough improvement plan had been drawn up for the Service, reflecting the issues stated in the Ofsted report and drawing on 10 key objectives of a good service for children and families which had been considered at the Children's Improvement Board.

The Committee was advised that the Improvement Board has now met twice and includes partners from a range of agencies (e.g. the independent Chair of Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Borough Commander and Clinical Commissioning Groups as well as internal officers and Councillors. The Board was chaired by Alan Wood, Director of Children's Services at Hackney Council. The aim of this Board being to 'hold a mirror up' at the improvement work and to encourage agencies to engage in a constructive critique of the services and ensuring that they meet the needs of children and families. It had developed a Forward Plan of items to be considered and the next two meetings of the Board will be looking at the various thresholds; recruitment; supervision and casework recordings.

The Committee was also informed that following the cleansing of the data and the streamlining of the some of the IT systems for recording referrals there is now a more reliable set of information going forward to be able to monitor improvements. The regular flow of these facts will work through officers and their relevant officer level boards before going to relevant elected members and the Improvement Board. This will be supplemented by other elements of quality assurance such as 'deep dive' case audits.

In addition, it was noted that due to the General Election there has been some delay in the Government formally issuing their directions in relation to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection. They was also a need to appoint an improvement partner for the local authority. Finally, when Ofsted visits next time as part of their programme of regular visits they will report on the progress, by which time the Authority needs to have made progress sufficient to assure Ofsted that the Authority is able to continue to make the improvements needed to protect and support our children and their families.

9.3 Scrutiny Work Planning Workshop

Noted that a Scrutiny Work Planning Workshop was scheduled for 22nd July, 2017 and would look at the range of scrutiny approaches available to the Committee and provided the opportunity to determine the key areas of focus and work for the Committee. This information would be used to update and refine the work plan for the year.

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The agenda circulated contained no exempt/ confidential business and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

11. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items

12. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

13. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS

Nil items

**14. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR
CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.45 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Denise Jones
Overview & Scrutiny Committee