

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2017

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

Members Present:

Councillor Denise Jones (Chair)	
Councillor Danny Hassell	– Scrutiny Lead for Children's
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim	
Councillor Oliur Rahman	
Councillor Rabina Khan	
Councillor Ayas Miah	– Scrutiny Lead for Governance
Councillor Helal Uddin	– Scrutiny Lead for Place
Councillor Andrew Wood	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources
Councillor Rajib Ahmed	

Co-opted Members Present:

Shabbir Chowdhury	– Parent Governors
Christine Trumper	– Parent Governors
Dr Phillip Rice	– Church of England
Fatiha Kassouri	– Parent Governors
Joanna Hannan	– Diocese of Westminster

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor David Edgar

Apologies:

Councillor Clare Harrisson	– Scrutiny Lead for Health & Adults
Asad M Jaman	– Muslim Faith Community

Officers Present:

Mark Baigent	– (Interim Divisional Director, Housing and Regeneration)
Mark Broom	– Detective Superintendent
Ann Corbett	– (Divisional Director, Community Safety)
Steve Crawley	– (Civil Protection and Business Continuity Coordinator, CLC)
Sharon Godman	– (Divisional Director, Strategy,

Afazul Hoque	–	Policy and Partnerships) (Interim Service Manager, Strategy, Policy & Performance)
Joseph Lacey-Holland	–	(Senior Strategy Policy & Performance Officer)
Neville Murton	–	(Divisional Director, Finance, Procurement & Audit)
Denise Radley	–	(Corporate Director, Health, Adults & Community)
David Knight	–	(Principal Committee Services Officer)

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 9th May, 2017 and 21st June, 2017 was approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS

The Committee was reminded that annually it appoints Lead Scrutiny Members for different policy areas and establishes it's Sub-Committees for the year. Certain Lead Members are also appointed as Chairs to various Sub-Committees. This process had taken place at the meeting on Wednesday 21 June 2017.

However, since that meeting the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, Councillor Denise Jones, had 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 had therefore 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 were still valid. The Committee therefore noted that they had before them a new report to allow for the opportunity to retake the decisions. As a result of consideration on this report.

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. To **agree** to continue to operate Scrutiny Leads with specific portfolios and if so to appoint Members to the posts as set out in Section 3 of this report.
2. To:
 - A. **Note** the terms of reference for the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee Appendix 1;
 - B. **Note** the terms of reference for the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee Appendix 2
 - C. **Note** the terms of reference for the Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee Appendix 3; and
 - D. **Note** that the Scrutiny Leads once appointed will take the Chairs of the above mentioned Sub-Committees.
3. Appointed the following Scrutiny Leads:

Portfolio	Elected Member
Lead for Health, Adults & Community Services (<i>Chair of Health Scrutiny</i>)	Councillor Clare Harrisson
Lead for Place (<i>Chair of Housing Scrutiny</i>)	Councillor Helal Uddin
Lead for Resources (<i>Chair of Grants Scrutiny</i>)	Councillor Andrew Wood
Lead for Children's Services	Councillor Danny Hassell
Lead for Governance	Councillor Ayas Miah

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

5. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

6. REVIEW OF THE TOWER HAMLETS EMERGENCY PLANNING AND CIVIL CONTINGENCY ARRANGEMENTS - PRESENTATION

Steve Crawley the Civil Protection & Business Continuity Co-ordinator, made a presentation to the Committee outlining incident response in London.

Following this, he was supported by Mark Broom (Metropolitan Police Service) and Ann Corbett (Divisional Director, Community Safety), in a question and answer session.

The Committee:

- Noted the role of councils in emergencies such as the provision of support for the emergency services; support and care for the local and wider community;
- Noted the use made of uses of their resources to mitigate the effects of an emergency; and taking the lead in the recovery stage;
- Noted what councils do in emergencies such as giving technical and engineering advice; building control; highways services; and public health and environmental issues;
- Noted that councils provide physical resources such as reception centres; accommodation and housing needs; and transport;
- Noted that welfare support is provided to those affected and the wider community **e.g.** such as social services; psychosocial support; helplines; and welfare and financial needs;
- Was advised that the Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO) was required to attend Tactical Coordination meetings, act as the link between the incident and the Borough Emergency Control Centre; and was in possession of effective communications with senior levels of the local authority;
- Felt that elected members have an important community leadership role in reassuring and communicating with local residents. Therefore, it was felt that that guidance/training should be made available to elected members in how to respond to emergencies and major incidents in their communities so they can respond appropriately and effectively;
- Felt that it was important that that LBTH was confident that any messages being communicated to the community were validated and consistent;
- Consideration needed to be given to how to reach those harder to reach groups in the local community who did not speak English as a first language during emergencies and major incidents;
- Noted that the Police Service in Tower Hamlets now had in post a community faith officer who would be reaching out to communities and building trust between them and the Police Service;
- Noted that the Police Service have utilised their twitter feed to get out messages in an informative and timely fashion during emergencies and major incidents;
- Was informed that the Government has established plans to provide an effective response to all types of emergencies and major crises at national, regional and local level. This involves pre-planned and coordinated responses from the emergency services, civil authorities and where appropriate, the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Therefore, if there is an emergency, local emergency services provide the first response; government departments or civil authorities may then request military assistance from MOD. The support of the armed

forces to civil authorities in the UK it was noted was officially termed Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA);

- Was advised that the MOD's role is concentrated on 2 main areas: (i) Providing niche capabilities, which MOD needs for its own purposes and which would not be efficient for the rest of government to generate independently, for example logistic assistance may be provided to civil authorities in carrying out their duties; and (ii) Standing ready to support the civil authorities when their capacity is overwhelmed. However, MACA is subject to the availability of resources, without affecting core MOD objectives. As the MOD does not generate and maintain forces specifically for such tasks. However, it was noted that the Council considers its resources to be sufficient and there are also established mutual aid arrangements across London Local Authorities should these become stretched;
- Requested that the Council explore the possibility of providing reports during emergencies and major incidents to elected members in the same style as those offered by the Police Service; and
- Enquired about the recent series of attacks involving the use of a corrosive or acidic substance and in particular what was being done to reassure the local communities. As a result it was noted that the Borough Commander had held an event with women at East London Mosque. Accordingly, it was hoped that this sort of engagement with women from across different communities would be supported and developed.

Actions

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

That:

1. Guidance/training be made available to elected members in how to respond appropriately and effectively to emergencies and major incidents in their communities; and
2. The Council explore the possibility of providing incident reports to elected members in the same style as those offered by the Police Service.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

7.1 Councillor Sirajul Islam (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing) - Presentation

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor Sirajul Islam (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing) and Mark Baigent (Interim Head of Strategy, Regeneration and Housing Options) that provided an overview of the items requested at the last meeting 21st June, 2017 by the

Committee pertaining to the housing portfolio; including updates on: residential fire safety; temporary accommodation policy; homelessness resulting from domestic violence, the housing register and new housing delivery vehicles. The Committee during a question and answer session:

- Noted the Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) position for those tower blocks in Tower Hamlets (including how this has changed in recent years and the cost implications of any remedial work);
- Welcomed the fact that when the Mayor came into office no residential blocks had a full up to date FRA whereas now all those blocks have had one within the past 9 months;
- Noted the commitment and funding made available for works to Tower Hamlets Homes residential blocks to ensure Fire Safety;
- Noted the procedures within the Housing Department for identifying and supporting victims of Domestic Violence (DV) who need re-housing. In response the Committee was informed that there had recently been an internal investigation within Housing Options that revealed procedure for victims of DV was not being properly followed. However, this is being addressed and will be improved via a restructure that is currently underway, helping to up-skill frontline staff on this issue;
- Asked how medical priority for housing is assessed for children of single parents with non-physical needs (especially those with autism). In reply it was noted that the Council is happy to review the process around medical prioritisation, especially in regards to autistic children;
- Noted that the Council's Autism Strategy is due at Cabinet in September and therefore should be a pre-decision scrutiny item at the next meeting of the Committee;
- Noted the number of items of identification required for enrolling on the Housing Register and the management of sensitive documentation. The items being requested are a way of ensuring probity in the housing registration process and ensuring that applicants can properly demonstrate their connection to Tower Hamlets.

Actions

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

That:

1. A copy of the re-housing procedure/policy for victims of DV;
2. They be provided reassurances that sensitive documentation is not being lost during the housing registration process; and
3. A benchmarking exercise should be undertaken to compare Tower Hamlets approach regarding the requirements and conditions for proving three year residency to apply for social housing.

7.2 Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn Report 2016-17

Councillor David Edgar (Cabinet Member for Resources) and Neville Murton (Divisional Director Finance, Procurement and Audit) presented a report that detailed the provisional outturn position of the Council for the financial year 2016-17. It was also noted that unlike in previous budget management reports this document is based on the actual position for the year rather than estimates and projections and forms the basis of the final accounts for the 2016-17 financial year. The information was therefore presented to reflect the Council's new structure which was implemented in January 2017. The Committee noted that the provisional position set out in the report was subject to changes arising from the production of the statutory statement of accounts and their subsequent audit review. The report included the following details of:-

1. General Fund Revenue Account;
2. Housing Revenue Account (HRA);
3. General Fund and HRA Capital expenditure and financing;
4. Summary of reserve movements;
5. 2016-17 final savings position; and
6. The Council's Balance Sheet at 31st March 2017.

The questions and comments from Members on the report are outlined as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the overall the Council's provisional outturn position is underspent by £0.733m which is in line with the £0.7m reported to Cabinet in March;
- Observed that the closing balance on the General Fund (Reserve) is £31.7m, which is broadly in line with the projections made in the MTFS reported in Feb 2017;
- Was informed that the provisional outturn for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a surplus of £9.1m which is an adverse movement of £2.1m above the position reported to Cabinet in March for period 9. This difference reflects the decision to purchase a property in March which was partly funded through the use of revenue resources and where the decision was taken after the previous outturn projection had been completed;
- Noted within the overall Capital Programme (i.e. General Fund and HRA) 82% of the revised capital budget for 2016-17 was achieved (£79.9m against budgets of £97.3m). The original Capital Programme approved for 2016-17 which included a number of indicative schemes totalled £228m. All capital expenditure in 2016-17 was fully funded from available resources including additional borrowing of c£2m;
- Was advised the report also included a number of key indicators taken from the Council's balance sheet that provided a 'snapshot' of the

overall financial health and efficiency of the Council's business. This included information relating to the Council's earmarked reserves and its Collection Fund;

- Commented that there were 6,000 empty homes in the Borough and wanted to know how these might be utilised for the 20,000 residents on the housing waiting list. In response it was noted that this is something that would need to be discussed with officers and that this item could then come to the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee;
- Noted that there was an underspend in the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and two year old places in the Capital Budget. In reply it was noted that this would need to be referred to the responsible service area if further detail above that set out in the relevant appendix was required;
- Asked about the proportion of council tax coming from self-employed residents and the impact of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) on these individuals. In reply it was noted that whilst those affected are a very small proportion of the overall number of CTRS claimants the impact upon them is being explored;
- Asked why there had been a decline in the General Fund Reserve. In response it was noted that this is mainly attributable to the work on the new Civic Centre and a review of level of all earmarked reserves, but the overall level of reserves continued to provide sufficient resilience.

Action

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

That:

1. Consideration is given to placing an empty homes item on the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee Forward Plan.

7.3 Community Cohesion Challenge Session

The Committee received a report from Councillor Mustaquim (Scrutiny Lead, Governance 2016/17) on the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Community Cohesion that was held on 12th April 2017. He provided an overview of the report that had been produced and outlined its six recommendations, which are aimed at further enhancing cohesion outcomes for Tower Hamlets.

The questions and comments from Members on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee noted that:

- the review had specifically considered the definition of community cohesion; national reviews related to cohesion; the key findings from the Casey Review and to establish to what extent those findings were

prevalent in Tower Hamlets by considering and comparing factual and statistical evidence; the Council's approach to grants and the associated impact on improving cohesion outcomes; reviewing language as driver of cohesion, including a consideration of the effectiveness of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision; the impact of the Council's policies on cohesion such as the school admissions, housing and planning policies; a consideration of the social and economic data and trends and the consequential impact on the gentrification of Tower Hamlets; the context of the Equalities Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equalities Duty on the Council to foster good relations between people and the Council's leadership role on cohesion;

- the report reflected the discussion from a two hour challenge session and recognised the limited amount of time that was available to cover such a wide ranging topic as cohesion. The report therefore focused on those particular aspects of cohesion that the challenge session had considered were important for Tower Hamlets. Also it was noted that a recommendation had been made to consider setting up a taskforce that would look at cohesion in more detail to address this;
- the report also highlighted that the Council is leading on best practice in this area **e.g.** Tower Hamlets role and involvement with London Councils to help develop the future approaches is noted and recognised;
- the report had also recognised the range and scale of projects being undertaken by the Council, addressing cohesion in Tower hamlets and made recommendations which aimed to further enhance cohesion outcomes for Tower Hamlets **e.g.** sports, arts and music could play a larger role in promoting community cohesion; and
- the findings from the challenge session discussion, which had included qualitative evidence and Councillors practical experience in the field, which had been supplemented by additional secondary sources. These had included a review of population statistics and trends; ward data; as well as consideration of the impact of legislation and findings from national reviews;
- a detailed action plan will be produced to implement the recommendations and that during the action planning stage the key risks, implications and mitigating actions will be identified and agreed.

Actions

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

To:

- **Agree** the report and the recommendations;

- **Authorise** the Divisional Director of Strategy, Policy and Partnership to amend the draft report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- **Agree** that the Action Plan should consider how the Council's sports, arts and music offer might to play a larger role in promoting community cohesion; and
- **Ask** that officers circulate the information about the Tension Monitoring Group to the Members of the Committee.

8. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Noted that verbal updates from Scrutiny Leads.

9. 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 25th June, 2017 meeting.

(The submitted pre-decision scrutiny questions of the unrestricted Cabinet papers for the 25th June, 2017 meeting is attached at Appendix 1).

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

Nil items

11. 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.

12. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items

13. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

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

Nil items

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

Nil items

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Denise Jones
Overview & Scrutiny Committee