

Non-Executive Report of the: Overview and Scrutiny Committee 20 th July 2017	
Report of: Sharon Godman, Divisional Director, Strategy Policy & Partnership Service, and Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance.	Classification: Unrestricted
A More Cohesive Borough: A Scrutiny Challenge Report	

Originating Officer(s)	Muhibul Hoque, Strategy, Policy and Partnership Officer – Strategy, Policy, and Partnership Service
Wards affected	All

Summary

1.1 This report provides the report and recommendations of the scrutiny challenge session held on 12th of April on community cohesion for consideration.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Agree the report and the recommendations; and
2. 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.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations from the “A More Cohesive Borough: A Scrutiny Challenge Session”, which was part of the Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee’s work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The committee may decide to not to agree the recommendations. This is not recommended as the report outlines work undertaken by Councillors and officers to identify areas of improvement.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Background and context

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Lead for Governance, Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim as part of his work programme for 2016/17 agreed to Chair a scrutiny challenge session to consider the implications of the national review by Dame Louise Casey on opportunity and integration, in the borough.
- 3.2 This challenge session offered the opportunity to review the work that the Council and its partners have undertaken/commissioned to deliver improved cohesion outcomes and to understand the impact of this work. Members wanted to understand what the important issues are related to cohesion in the borough and what can be done further to enhance cohesion.
- 3.3 The scrutiny challenge session membership included:

Name	Title	Organisation
Councillor Muhammad Mustaqim	Chair, Cllr Independent Group, St Peter's ward	LBTH
Councillor Shiria Khatun	Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Cohesion	LBTH
Councillor Amina Ali	Cllr, Labour, Bow East	LBTH
Fokrul Hoque	Chair	Safer Neighbourhood Board
Gemma Cossins	Acting CEO	THVCS
Sadia Ahmed	Deputy Young Mayor	LBTH
Emily Fieran Reed	Cohesion, Community Engagement & Commissioning Manager	LBTH, Strategy, Policy & Partnership
Gulam Hussain	Senior Strategy, Policy & Performance Officer	LBTH, Strategy, Policy & Partnership
Iqbal Raakin	Strategy, Policy & Performance Officer	LBTH, Strategy, Policy & Partnership
Muhibul Hoque	Strategy, Policy & Performance Officer	LBTH, Strategy, Policy & Partnership
Simon Leveaux	Deputy Head of Idea Store Learning	Idea Store Learning, LBTH
Leanne Chandler	Skills for Life Manager	Idea Store Learning
Paul Jordan	Prevent Co-ordinator	Community Safety, LBTH

3.8 Evidence gathering and methodology

3.9 The review specifically looked at:

- 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 Cohesion Programme which included a prima facie review of existing projects and funding

- The Council's approach to grants and the associated impact on improving cohesion outcomes.
- Language as driver of cohesion, including a consideration of the effectiveness of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.
- The impact of council 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 the borough.
- 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.

3.10 The report with recommendations is attached as Appendix 1. There are six recommendations arising from the challenge session held on April 12th 2017. It is useful to note that the report reflects the discussion from a two hour challenge session. The report recognises the limited amount of time that was available to cover such a wide ranging topic as cohesion. The report therefore focusses on the particular aspects of cohesion that the challenge session felt were important for Tower Hamlets. A recommendation has been made to consider setting up a taskforce that looks at cohesion in more detail to address this.

3.11 The report also highlights that the Council is leading on best practice in this area, as an example its role and involvement with London Councils to help develop the future approaches is noted and recognised. The report also recognises the range and scale of projects being undertaken by the Council, addressing cohesion in Tower hamlets. The report makes recommendations which aim to further enhance cohesion outcomes for the borough.

3.12 Findings from the challenge session discussion, which included qualitative evidence and Councillors practical experience in the field, have been supplemented by additional secondary sources. These include review of population statistics and trends, ward data, as well as consideration of the impact of legislation and findings from national reviews. The recommendations arising from this range of evidence sources are outlined below:

Recommendation 1: The Council develops an approach and action plan to: mainstream cohesion across Council services and activities, explore external funding opportunities and develop a robust evaluation, review and reporting process for all cohesion activities and initiatives

Recommendation 2: Idea Store Learning should explore a common assessment process between internal and external providers of ESOL in the borough to ensure appropriate analysis of user needs and better matching to course places.

Recommendation 3: The Council should commission more projects which tackle isolation and encourage strong positive relations and friendship between different groups in the borough.

Recommendation 4: The Council reviews the Grant and Commissioning Policies to ensure that there is a stronger focus on cohesion.

Recommendation 5: Explore how leadership on cohesion can be developed by the Council through the delivery of specialised training for Councillors, senior officers and community leaders.

Recommendation 6: Explore setting up a taskforce to consider the impact of gentrification on cohesion in the borough.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, if any of the six recommendations made by the scrutiny challenge report are adopted and it is ascertained that additional financial resources will be required to implement them; officers will then be obliged to seek appropriate approval through the Council's financial approval process.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 5.1 The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants. The Committee may also make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions.
- 5.2 The Casey review report highlighted a number of challenges to integration including those stemming from immigration with net migration figures continually rising; minority ethnic groups becoming more dispersed whilst also being more concentrated and segregated in areas across the UK; and lack of English language proficiency amongst certain ethnic groups inhibiting integration and exacerbating inequalities, especially for some groups of ethnic minority women. The challenges, identified included: Building community resilience; Putting greater emphasis on British Values; Reducing economic exclusion, inequality and segregation; and Providing better leadership and integrity in public office.
- 5.3 Following the Casey Review, an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration, Chaired by Chuka Umunna MP, published an interim report on Integration of Immigrants. The report echoed many of the points raised by Louse Casey in her review. There were key distinctions and which were that the APPG report focused on integration of immigrants rather than those from

specific ethnic or religious backgrounds. It also talked about integration as a “two way street” i.e. that the onus for integration is upon both the immigrant and the host communities. It noted that conflating integration with extremism was counter-productive and may lead to alienation of certain communities and therefore recommended that local action plans on integration are produced.

5.4 The Challenge Session’s reviewed the work that the Council and its partners have undertaken/ commissioned to deliver improved cohesion outcomes and to understand the impact of this work as well as what can be done further to enhance cohesion. Six recommendations have been proposed and all are capable of being undertaken within the Council’s powers.

5.5 When considering its approach to this report and its recommendations, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Information relevant to this is contained in the One Tower Hamlets section below.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 This challenge session report carries out an assessment of cohesion in the borough and makes a set of recommendations for the Council and its VCS partners to enhance cohesion. The Council and its partners are under a public sector equalities duty to foster good relations between those with a protected characteristics and the wider community. This report makes a number of recommendations which ensure that the Council achieves a number of positive cohesion related outcomes. The recommendations seek collaborative working across the organisation, with local partners, stakeholders and residents which ensure and foster good relations between residents from different backgrounds.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The recommendations in this report are made as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee’s role in helping to secure continuous improvement for the council, as required under its Best Value duty.

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

8.1 There are no direct sustainable actions for the greener environment arising from this report.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Once the report has been agreed by Governance DMT and Overview and Scrutiny Committee, officers will produce a detailed action plan, to implement the recommendations. Therefore, during the action planning stage the key risks, implications and mitigating actions will be identified and agreed.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct sustainable actions for greener environment arising from this report.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1: A More Cohesive Borough: A Scrutiny Challenge Report

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- NONE.