

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 7 APRIL 2009

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

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Asad (Chair)
Councillor Ahmed Hussain
Councillor Waiseul Islam
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor David Snowdon
Councillor Bill Turner (Vice-Chair)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Lutfur Rahman
Councillor Ohid Ahmed

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr Ahbab Miah – (Parent Governor Representative)

Officers Present:

Ashraf Ali – (Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Daisy Beserve – (Policy Officer, Strategy & Performance)
Afazul Hoque – (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager)
Michael Keating – (Service Head, Scrutiny & Equalities)
Martin Smith – (Chief Executive)
Jon Underwood – (Interim Service Head, Strategy & Performance)

Nadir Ahmed – (Trainee Committee Officer)
Amanda Thompson – (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephanie Eaton and Ann Jackson, and Co-opted Member Mr H Mueenuddin.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2009 be agreed as a correct record.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

None.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section One reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 11 March 2009.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Cllr Lutfur Rahman, Leader of the Council, opened his presentation by thanking Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for all their hard work throughout the year, and for the important role they had played in ensuring residents got excellent services.

Councillor Rahman reported that the key priorities for the Council over the last year had been:

- To reduce over-crowding;
- To raise GCSE results to be amongst the best in the country;
- To reduce levels of youth unemployment;
- To address anti-social behaviour and crime;
- To improve cleanliness and quality of the public realm.

In relation to these priorities, he made the following points:

- £20 million was being invested to alleviate overcrowding by building family size homes and buying back council properties that had been sold under the Right to Buy scheme;
- The Choice Based Lettings system was to be reviewed and improved;
- The Working Neighbourhood Funds had helped 4,500 people into employment;
- The Council had a plan in place to reduce the number of young people who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) by 50% over the next year;
- The Council had introduced the London Living Wage for all members of staff and thereby set an example for other employers;

- There had been a £1 million investment in Youth Services in the Borough, this had allowed youth centres to remain open for longer hours and had increased services, especially for girls and young people with disabilities;
- GCSE results were now amongst the best in the country;
- Key Stage 2 results were above the national average;
- £300 million was being invested in the 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) project. This would lead to new buildings for schools as well as renovation of existing buildings;
- The Council was working with Central Government, Head Teachers and School Governors to improve standards of schools;
- £700,000 was being spent on 17 new Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) Police Officers; with two more being provided by the Metropolitan Police Force;
- In addition, £500,000 was being spent on CCTV and Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers;
- The 'Dealer-A-Day' operation was seeing mid- to high-level drug dealers being targeted in a bid to reduce the levels of illegal drugs in the Borough;
- The economic downturn impacted on regeneration efforts in the Borough, however Robin Hood Gardens and the Blackwall Reach area as well as the Bishopsgate Goods Yard were ready for redevelopment;
- There was scope for billions of pounds in revenue for the Council and its partners through Section 106 (S106) agreements with developers;
- £238 million was already secured for the Ocean Estate redevelopment;
- The Council had received a £5 million grant to encourage exercise and healthy eating amongst the residents of the Borough;
- The Council's leisure centres now provided free swimming for residents on Fridays;
- The local history archives in Bancroft Library were to be retained, along with the building;
- £100,000 was being secured for the Bethnal Green Tube Disaster Memorial;
- £5 million was being spent on regenerating Victoria Park;
- £2 million was being spent on High Street 2012, the route the Olympic Marathon would take – this was to be spent in conjunction with English Heritage on public realm as well as securing heritage sites along the route;
- Multi-Area Agreements were being drawn up by the Five Borough Joint Committee to ensure maximum benefit was gained from the Olympics;
- The Council's services were currently being maintained but innovative ways of making savings were needed;
- All this was underpinned by the One Tower Hamlets theme.

In response to questions from members of the Committee, Cllr Rahman made the following points:

- 28% of the residents of Tower Hamlets were under 25 years of age. An employment strategy was being developed by Cllr Alibor Choudhury,

Lead Member for Employment and Skills, to provide these residents with the skills and training needed to equip them to enter the workforce; and the Working Neighbourhood Fund was providing funding to carry out this work in partnership with other agencies;

- Limited resources, as well as government legislation, meant that certain groups of people were not given priority to be housed or re-housed as they were not classified as vulnerable, and this problem had been recognised;
- The £1 million investment in Youth Services was designed so the money would follow the young people instead of individual youth centres. This would help eradicate any perception of an east/west divide. Youth centres in the Borough provided an excellent service, although some needed improvement;
- The Council was involved in discussions regarding the future of Poplar Baths;
- If Tower Hamlets Homes could achieve a two star rating, it would qualify for further funding to raise more of the housing stock to decent standards;
- To increase community cohesion, the Council had to ensure that there was equality of service, not just equality of philosophy or ideas;
- The Olympics would provide an opportunity for the residents of Tower Hamlets in terms of employment, housing and public realm. Cllr A. Choudhury was working on an employment strategy to maximise employment for local people and work was underway to ensure that as many affordable homes for Tower Hamlets residents were secured in the Olympic Village. Multi-Area Agreements meant that Central Government was providing extra money to be spent on increasing employment and Job Centre Plus money would be devolved to the five boroughs, so it could be spent where it was needed the most;
- After consultation with officers, the initial proposal for the Ocean Estate was rejected as it was felt the level of social housing was too low. The proposal was to be redrafted to increase the level of social housing. Concerns about cleanliness should be reported to Tower Hamlets Homes to deal with. Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers as well as the 19 new police officers would help tackle the situation with drugs on this estate;
- The Council was doing what it could to encourage healthy eating amongst its residents, but planning applications could only be determined according to legislation and on their individual merits and therefore there could not be a blanket ban on fast food outlets;
- Overcrowding was an issue in the Borough however over the last 2-3 years, 1,000 new homes had been built every year. There was £20 million to buy back council properties brought under the Right to Buy scheme and new homes were being build in partnership with Registered Social Landlords;
- £30 million was being invested in St Paul's Way school through the 'Building Schools for the Future' project to give it state of the art facilities. The current senior management were interim during the period of reorganisation and there were no plans to make it an

academy. How modern foreign languages are taught in individual schools was an issue which parents should take up with governing bodies;

- Stock transfers allowed investments to be made, to raise housing stock to decent standards. Overall, stock transfer had worked, with just some minor concerns that still needed to be addressed. If Tower Hamlets Homes could get a two star rating from the Audit Commission, then they could lever in £200 million which would go towards improving the housing stock. Opportunities would continue to be explored and a housing strategy developed, bearing in mind the small size of the Borough and its dense population;
- The 19 new police officers would be managed in partnership with the Borough Commander and the local police force;
- The Participatory Budgeting exercises had been a success with £2.4 million spent across the Borough. However as it was a new process there were still some initial concerns, and safeguards would be put in place to ensure the system could not be manipulated;
- The car-free arrangements that were in place in some estates/developments needed to be reviewed if it was felt to be discriminatory;
- There was a target to reduce the use of consultants by 10% and they were only used when it was necessary.

The Chair thanked the Leader for his presentation and for answering the Committee's questions.

8. ADJOURNMENT FOR PRAYERS

The meeting adjourned at 8:00pm and reconvened at 8.15pm.

9. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

9.1 Comprehensive Area Assessment

Daisy Beserve, Strategy and Performance, addressed the Committee with a presentation on the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

She reported that the new assessment framework would have a more local area focus – based on people, places and outcomes. The results would be made public, in plain English and in an accessible format.

She reported that working in partnership would be a key element of the CAA as local authorities could not tackle issues alone. Green flags would be used as an indicator of good performance and red flags would be used to highlight areas of concern. Where improvements had been made, the sustainability of those improvements would also be inspected.

The Audit Commission would continue to be the inspectorate that would carry out the assessment of the Council. It would look at how well performance management was carried out and how well resources were managed.

Members would have a central role in this process through their leadership in the community as well as in leading performance management. The CAA would also use scrutiny reviews as a source of information. Their findings would also help the Overview & Scrutiny Committee prioritise their work programme. Ward members, as well as the general public, would be able to use the CAA as an independent source of information.

Ms Beserve reported that in order for the CAA results to be successful, the community had to be understood by the Council and its partners, and shared priorities had to be developed that suited that understanding. An understanding of the Council's performance and the challenges ahead were also needed. The Council also had to ensure it worked effectively with its partners and focused on outcomes.

Members of the Committee asked questions about value for money, the definition of inefficiency, the green/red flag indicators and seasonality of data and the inspections of Children's Services.

Following the discussion the Committee

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted.

9.2 Draft Strategic Plan 2009/10

This item was withdrawn.

10. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

10.1 Alcohol Misuse Amongst Young People (Smashed) - Report of the Scrutiny Working Group

Councillor Shiria Khatun, Scrutiny Lead, A Safe and Supportive Community, introduced the report to the Committee and additionally took the opportunity to thank all the Council officers who contributed to undertaking the review.

Councillor Khatun advised that her decision to carry out the review was based on 4 key reasons:

- To tackle an issue before it became a major problem and implementing recommendations that would prevent a problem from occurring;
- To help protect young people from the many risks associated with alcohol misuse including obesity, cancers, vascular and liver disease and mental and sexual ill health;

- As Tower Hamlets had one of the youngest populations in Europe, it was important to contribute to supporting young people in the borough to live well and stay safe from ill health and crime;
- To protect the community from alcohol related deaths.

The Committee was advised that throughout the review process it became apparent that a lot of the evidence was in fact anecdotal or unreliable. Therefore it had been extremely hard to determine the exact numbers that were actually drinking. However evidence did show, as would be expected, that those that did drink were more likely to involve themselves with crime and anti-social behaviour.

It was claimed during a meeting with local voluntary organisations that there had been a rise in Bangladeshi drinkers based on media reports, hospital referrals and anecdotal accounts.

The Working Group also evaluated the messages given to young people and their parents/guardians showing the dangers associated with alcohol misuse. The Group was told that a more robust method of information dissemination was needed and that use of BME media would help to do this.

Other important findings included the need to have better prevention and enforcement tactics by working with local business and increasing test purchases. There was a need to make sure that the Healthy Schools Programme was sufficiently supported to ensure that young people continued to receive education about the dangers of alcohol misuse, and that youth clubs were used more to help do this.

The Committee noted that while the findings of the Group still indicated that only a very small number abuse alcohol, there was considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that the problem could escalate particularly if sections of the community were unwilling to discuss it.

Councillor Khatun stated that the recommendations arising from the report were therefore aimed at addressing this challenge, and making this work would require a co-ordinated and consistent approach across the public, private and third sectors as well as with the wider community.

The Chair thanked Councillor Khatun for her presentation and the Committee

RESOLVED

1. To agree that the draft report be taken forward for submission to Cabinet; and
2. That the Service Head for Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree the final report before its submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for A Safe and Supportive Community.

11. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

A Great Place to Live – Affordable Homeownership Review

Councillor Islam reported that whilst undertaking this review Members had visited developments, considered newer models for introducing affordable homeownership and also held discussions with developers to consider how the affordability issue might be addressed.

The final report and recommendations would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May 2009.

Prosperous Communities – Parental Involvement in Secondary Education Review

Councillor Sardar reported that the Working Group had now concluded all review meetings and visits. Since the last update, he had attended a parents' conference at the Ecology Pavilion, and this had provided an opportunity to talk with parents about the difficulties they faced when engaging in their children's schools.

The Working Group had also met to discuss draft recommendations for the final report and these would be presented to the Committee in May.

Excellent Public Services – Early Intervention/Child Protection Review

Councillor Turner reported that the final meeting of this review group had taken place on 23rd March 2009, and the Working Group had considered how to deal with children whose parents had mental health problems, misused substances and were either victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.

It was expected that the final report would be presented to the Committee in May.

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 Amendments to the Council's Lettings Policy (CAB 138/089)

1. What assurance can the Cabinet give us that the revised Lettings Policy will consider all possible courses for appeal to ensure we do not face a similar judicial review in the future?

2. Can the Cabinet explain how the revised Lettings Policy will give reasonable preference to non priority homeless residents?

Agenda Item 6.2 Local Authority Carbon Management Programme(CAB 139/089)

1. Are the targets for reducing C2 emissions realistic and can they actually be achieved?

Agenda Item 6.3 Communities, Localities & Cultural Services Directorate Capital Programme 2009/10 (CAB 140/089)

1. There are a number of proposed schemes related to the Olympics. Can the Cabinet inform us how much contribution we are getting from the Olympic Delivery Authority and if none why?
2. Can you tell us how you have identified the areas of work listed in Appendices A &B?
3. Can the Cabinet explain why Archibald Park is not included within the list of improvements to parks listed in Appendix B, despite councillors and residents complaints about ASB in and around Archibald Park?

Agenda Item 8.1 Commission into the Public Safety of Young People in Tower Hamlets (CAB 141/089)

1. This report does not seem to deal with the growing problem of post code gang violence. Can the Cabinet tell us how they will address this issue as part of this report and the development of the next Youth Justice Plan?

The meeting ended at 8.55pm

Chair, Councillor Abdul Asad
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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