

**Overview and Scrutiny  
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council  
May 2009**



**TOWER HAMLETS**

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## Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

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Overview and Scrutiny looks at how the Council and its partners deliver services so that they meet local needs and contribute to the overall vision in the borough's Community Plan. It also monitors the decisions made by the Council's Cabinet to make sure that they are robust and provide good value for money.

Overview and Scrutiny has statutory powers to review and scrutinise local health services and make recommendations to NHS bodies. It also considers other issues of concern to local people, including services provided by other organisations, and advises the Cabinet, Council and sometimes other partners, on how those policies and services can be improved.

### Membership

The Committee coordinates all Overview and Scrutiny work. Reflecting the overall political balance of the Council during 2008/09 the Committee's membership comprised seven Labour councillors, two Conservative councillors and one each from the Respect and Liberal Democrat parties.

As well as the councillors, five other people served on the Committee who have specific responsibilities for education. There were two representatives appointed by the Anglican and Roman Catholic Dioceses. There were also two parent governors. Each of these representatives could contribute to any matters discussed by the Committee but they could only vote on education issues. The final member was a non-voting representative of the Muslim community for education issues. The decision to have this position was a local one in recognition of the large Muslim community in the borough.

### Scrutiny Chair and Leads

The Chair of the Committee in 2008/09 was Councillor Abdul Asad. The Chair oversees the work programme of the committee as well as taking lead on monitoring the Council's budget.

There are six 'Scrutiny Leads,' one for each of the themes in the Tower Hamlets Community Plan, with a further lead on Excellent Public Services. These have been agreed this year following the refresh of the Community Plan and the introduction of the new themes. The Scrutiny Leads were:

- Cllr Bill Turner (Labour) for "Excellent Public Services," focusing on improving public services to make sure they represent good value for money and meet local needs. He was also Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar (Labour) for "Prosperous Community," focusing on raising educational aspirations, expectations and achievement, and bringing investment into the borough and ensuring residents and businesses benefit from growing economic prosperity.
- Cllr Waiseul Islam (Labour) for "Great Place to Live," focusing on improving housing and the environment and providing a wide range of arts and leisure services.
- Cllr Shiria Khatun (Labour) for "Safe and Supportive," focusing on reducing crime, making people feel safer and providing excellent services to the borough's most vulnerable communities.
- Cllr Ann Jackson (Labour) for "One Tower Hamlets," focusing on reducing inequalities and improving community cohesion through community leadership.
- Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton (Liberal Democrats) for "Healthy Community," through the Health Scrutiny Panel, focusing on improving local health services and the co-ordination of different health service providers within the borough.

The Scrutiny Leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders. They also pick up any relevant issues on behalf of the Committee as a whole and lead the working groups within their theme.

There are four non-executive Members who also sit on the Committee. In 2008/09 these were:

Cllr Abjol Miah

Cllr Oliur Rahman

Cllr Ahmed Hussain – December 2008 – May 2009

Cllr David Snowden - December 2008 – May 2009

They have contributed both to the work of the Committee and Scrutiny Review Groups. In particular their contribution on the call-ins, scrutiny spotlights and performance monitoring have been really useful in holding the Executive to account and ensuring that our services meet the needs of our local residents. They have also been actively involved in a number of the Scrutiny Review Working Groups and contributed to the formation of a number of recommendations from those groups.

### **What does Overview and Scrutiny do?**

The Committee:

- looks at how the Council is performing by monitoring key strategies and plans
- looks at the Council's budget and how it uses its resources.
- sets up time-limited working groups to look at issues in depth and make proposals for change. Suggestions for topics may come from elected Members, full Council, the Cabinet or from local organisations and residents.
- considers decisions made by the Cabinet that are 'called in.' This happens if there is concern about the decision or what information was considered.
- reviews briefly the reports that are going to Cabinet for decision and raises any concerns.

As the Committee has such a broad responsibility, it focuses on a number of key priorities each year. These make up an annual work programme for each of the Scrutiny Leads. For each area there is usually one in-depth review, as well as other shorter pieces of work.

### **Health Scrutiny**

The Government has given local councils specific responsibilities to scrutinise health services. The Health Scrutiny Panel was set up to do this and can look at any matter relating to health services within the borough, including hospital and GP services, health promotion and prevention. This includes the way that health services are planned, how services are provided and how NHS organisations consult with local people.

Under the Healthcare Commission's new Annual Healthcheck for all NHS trusts, the Health Scrutiny Panel can comment on local Trusts' declarations against 24 Core Standards. These cover seven areas:

- Safety
- Clinical and cost effectiveness
- Governance
- Patient focus
- Accessible and responsive care
- Care environment and amenities
- Public health

There is also a duty on local health services to consult with the Health Scrutiny Panel if they are making substantial changes to services.

### **Annual Report**

This report provides a brief summary of the work of Overview and Scrutiny in 2008/09. Each member of the Committee outlines the work that they have undertaken both in the reviews that they have led and also their work on the Committee.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillor Abdul Asad, Chair

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This is the fifth year since we changed our arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets. These arrangements include:

- a single co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- five Scrutiny Leads scrutinising the new Community Plan themes and one for Excellent Public Services
- pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports
- performance monitoring by considering the Tower Hamlets Index, Strategic Plan, the Diversity and Equality Action Plan, Corporate Complaints and Members' Enquiries
- a robust call-in procedure

We agreed a challenging and extensive work programme in July 2008 and I believe we have delivered on the majority of it. Over the year, we regularly monitored our progress to make sure we remained on track to complete our work.

This year, we have improved significantly the engagement with Lead Members at Committee. They have presented the majority of reports within their portfolio that the Committee considered, as well as responding to call-ins. This is really important in making sure we hold the Executive directly to account and encouraging more discussion and debate among councillors.

There has also been a good level of engagement with the public. Firstly, the majority of our reviews sought the views and experiences of local people through visits and focus groups. And secondly, a number of deputations were made by members of the public at Committee, usually related to a call-in that was being considered.

### **Performance Monitoring**

We monitor the Tower Hamlets Index (THI) regularly, quarterly the Council's Strategic Plan and twice a year we monitor the Diversity and Equality Action Plan. We are the only formal councillor forum that does this and it's important in making sure that our services are performing well. I believe this worked effectively and helped Overview and Scrutiny understand and comment on the wider performance of services - a key part of improving the quality of life of local people.

We also had monthly Scrutiny Spotlights at our Committee meetings for the Cabinet Members including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. At all the sessions Lead Members discussed the performance and challenges facing services in their area of responsibility. This was particularly useful for us to discuss issues of concern and suggest ways performance could be improved. It also helped involve Lead Members more in the scrutiny process and several of them commented how useful they found the opportunity to discuss policy and performance issues with non-executive councillors at Committee. The Leader of the Council at his spotlight session commented that "*Overview and Scrutiny made a valuable contribution to the work of the authority, both through detailed reviews and comments on items referred to and from Cabinet*".

The Committee consistently challenged Cabinet Members on areas of underperformance, including anti-social behaviour, provisions for young people and perhaps most importantly on recycling. This last area was subject to a full-scale scrutiny review in 2006/07, and the committee was determined that the Council continues the improvement in recycling rates within the borough.

We also considered the Council's annual Corporate and Social Care Complaints report and an update on the Members' Enquiries system and performance. All councillors were pleased to see the improved performance in responding to both complaints and Members' enquiries. Councillors take up many complaints each year, and getting a quick and full response is an essential part of that work. We welcomed the on-going work the Council was doing with local Registered Social Landlords and other partners to improve their performance and quality of response on Members Enquiries.

### **Policy Framework**

Within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework there are a number of key policy documents that set out how the Council will act. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider these before Council agrees them and this year we discussed the following:

- **Tower Hamlets Community Plan to 2020 and Local Area Agreement( LAA)**  
The Committee welcomed the new Community Plan to 2020 and the areas identified in the LAA. The Committee highlighted that the lack of figures on some of the targets within the Community Plan proved difficult to understand and scrutinise. The Committee also reinforced to Cabinet the importance of increasing social rental housing and providing affordable housing which is accessible for residents of the borough based on the average income. The Committee also believed that the Council should be benchmarking itself against other Boroughs, particularly the leading performers in each area, and thus driving forward its own goals and performance.
- **Crime and Drugs Reduction Partnership Plan 2008-2011**  
The Committee welcomed the Plan and noted that crime still remained a major concern for local residents in the Annual Residents Survey. Members commented that in line with the Community Plan theme of One Tower Hamlets this strategy should also refer to the needs of all communities rather than individual communities. Concerns were also raised about the limited consultation undertaken with residents, as their input into this key strategy is vital to ensure it reflects the needs of all the communities. The importance of up-to-date data was also highlighted in setting appropriate and ambitious targets. Members felt resident satisfaction survey on the police such as the annual residents' survey would be useful to help set appropriate targets for this plan.
- **Children and Young People's Plan 2009-10**  
The Committee welcomed the Plan and thanked the Lead Member for Children's Services and Officers for the extensive work that had gone into developing the plan. We raised a number of issues for Cabinet to consider which included 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 was a very important time of transition for young people. The Committee raised concerns about inter-generational worklessness and felt that the Plan should outline how this problem was being addressed and how young people were supported to be successful.

## Scrutiny of the Budget

We considered the Council's budget at two of our meetings.

In July we considered the Resource Allocation and Budget Review 2009/10 – 2010/11 and supported the Council's approach in recognition of the strong financial management. However, we made the following observations for consideration by Cabinet:

1. The under spend in the General Fund and Housing Revenue was welcomed and Cabinet was encouraged to utilise this to address issues such as overcrowding;
2. That consideration be given through both the Council's fund and the Working Neighbourhood Fund on addressing unemployment in specific wards;
3. Continue engaging the local community and the third sector in the budget consultation process.

In February, we considered Cabinet's budget proposals for 2009/10. Committee Members challenged the Lead Member for Resources & Performance about the quality of consultation with residents and asked for improvements in future years. The Committee expressed concerns about the amount of money the Council was investing in waste disposal but welcomed the proposals to increase recycling. Finally, we welcomed the significantly increased investment in frontline services and supported the 1.69% per cent increase in Council Tax.

### Pre-decision scrutiny

The committee can submit questions about Cabinet reports before a decision is taken. I feel we have strengthened this over the year and commented on 38 Cabinet reports (compared to 65 last year). Among these were:

- Commission into the Public Safety of Young People in Tower Hamlets
- Local Area Agreement (LAA) Refresh
- Draft 2009/12 Tower Hamlets Housing Strategy
- Baishaki Mela Options 2009
- ASBO Publicity Protocol
- Resourcing Youth Services
- Working Neighbourhoods Fund Proposed Interventions
- Recycling Improvement Plan for Tower Hamlets

Our questions and concerns provided further information at Cabinet and clarified some uncertainties thus improving the decision-making process. The responses also inform councillors' decisions over call-ins.

### Call-ins

The Committee has considered five call-ins this year. This is a significant decrease from last year when there were 16.

#### Report Called-in

Heron Quays West – Proposal to Use Compulsory Purchase Powers to Aid Land Assembly and Development  
London Thames Gateway Development Corporation - Draft Bromley-by-Bow Land Use Design Brief  
33-37 The Oval and Bethnal Green Gasholders Site, E3  
Disposal of Greenfel School Site  
Communities, Localities and Cultural Services Directorate  
Capital Programme 2009/10

#### O&S Decision

Confirmed  
Confirmed  
Confirmed  
Confirmed  
Confirmed



Debate of the call-ins was robust and rigorous. We confirmed all the decisions of the Cabinet although on a number of these the Lead Members gave assurances that they would take some of the concerns raised on board. For example, on 33-37 The Oval and Bethnal Green Gasholders Site the Committee made 3 recommendations which have been taken on by the Lead Member and the Chief Executive and an update provided to the Committee informing us that the investigation is taking place and the Committee will be kept informed with the progress.

It is also worth highlighting that because of the items called in, attendance by local people and other councillors has increased substantially at the Committee meetings. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny and highlight the important role it has within the borough.

### **Co-opted and Appointed Representatives**

After the difficulty in appointing all of the co-opted Members last year we have now managed to recruit the two parent governors. We organised an Induction Session for co-opted members and considered how we could develop their role and help them be more effective. We also welcomed the appointment of 7 local residents from the Future Women Councillors Initiative onto all the Scrutiny Working Groups. This has been particularly useful in bringing local residents views into our scrutiny reviews and also the development of a number of recommendations of the Working Groups.

We intend to build on this further next year to enable co-opted Members to help us engage more local residents in the scrutiny process and ensure that more of their concerns come to the Committee's attention.

### **Raising the Profile**

We continue to improve how and when we communicate with Members, Officers and the public. We used the weekly Members' Bulletin regularly. The Manager's Briefing and the staff newsletter, *Pulling Together*, were also used to promote scrutiny work, so that council officers are well informed about the scrutiny work programme, upcoming reviews, review findings, and how they can be involved.

*East End Life* and our Scrutiny web pages are also vehicles to keep residents informed about the work scrutiny was undertaking. A number of the reviews attracted significant interest from local people, particularly the Child Poverty and Alcohol Misuse Amongst Young People reviews. More detail of these is included in the reports by the Scrutiny Leads.

We organised a conference on "Scrutinising Partnerships" which was funded by Capital Ambition and part of a programme of events organised by the London Scrutiny Network. There were over 60 councillors and officers from across London in attendance which used the action learning principle with the aim of exploring the inroads made by the local partnership and scrutiny. Participants visited five different projects to gather evidence on the partnership in question and draw up the scope for a scrutiny review. The event therefore provided not only information into how different partnerships functioned in Tower Hamlets but also a way of practising how to scrutinise partnerships. A publication by the London Scrutiny Network "Holding to Account in London" recognised the innovative format of this event but more importantly highlighted the positive work scrutiny in Tower Hamlets have undertaken with the local partnership.

The Scrutiny review from 2007/08 - 'Licensing of Strip Clubs' - was recognised as an example of good practice by the London Scrutiny Network in the publication mentioned above. They

highlighted how scrutiny can engage the local community on a controversial issue and bring forward recommendations which directly represent the views of local residents. They highlighted the good practice and recommended it to other councils. The scrutiny report was also presented to the Department of Culture, Media and Sports as part of their consultation with local authorities on the control of lap dancing establishments. The Council's response to this consultation was primarily based on the scrutiny review and outlined the Council's support for all forms of striptease to be placed under the category of 'sexual encounter establishments'.

### **Checking our own progress**

Twice a year we monitor the recommendations we have made, not just those at committee but also those from our reviews and other investigations. Services are asked to provide an update so we can see whether progress is being made. The latest monitoring indicates that nearly all of our recommendations since July 2006 are being acted on or achieved. As part of the Health Scrutiny Panel's work programme we also considered the progress being made against the action plan of last year's review on Tobacco Cessation.

One key area of improvement that the committee needs to focus on in future years is the level of participation by back bench councillors in the Scrutiny Reviews. We recognise that members have many other commitments and that the meetings were mostly packed into the latter part of the year. Nevertheless, these reviews were heavily dependent upon the involvement of a small group of committed councillors. We hope that each of the Party Leaders will encourage all members of their Political Group to take an interest in at least one of the Scrutiny Reviews in future.

### **Communities in Control White Paper**

We have begun work with officers across the Council and our partners in developing a pilot for the Councillor Call for Action and also implementing other areas of actions identified in the Communities in Control White Paper and currently being considered by Parliament in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill. Discussions are underway and we hope to incorporate this into our work programme for next year.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I believe the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has made considerable progress this year. In particular, having Lead Members attend the Committee to present reports and outline the reasons for decisions has significantly enhanced the role and value of scrutiny. We are holding the Executive to account - particularly around performance monitoring and through considering call-ins – and influencing Cabinet decisions. The reviews have also made an important contribution to addressing local people's concerns – for example, around alcohol misuse amongst young people and affordable homeownership. In addition to this reviews have worked with partners, officers and other councillors to improve services.

In the pipeline are Government proposals to extend the role of scrutiny through the proposals outlined in the Communities in Control White Paper in particular around increasing the visibility of scrutiny and increasing scrutiny of the partnership providing Councillors a greater say in place shaping their area. This is an exciting time to be part of Scrutiny and I believe that our work this year has equipped us to strengthen the impact of the committee in the future.

The refresh of the Community Plan in 2008 has led to a new role for the Excellent Public Services Scrutiny portfolio, with the specific concern of the portfolio being to improve public services by ensuring they represent good value for money and meet local needs. I was keen this year to use this opportunity to review one of our key services to the community – safeguarding children.

### **Early Intervention – Child Protection**

This year's review focused on early intervention in the field of Children's Social Care, which involves providing support for families before the need for statutory interventions, such as taking children into care, arises. This area captured my attention as a key area for review given the high and growing workload of the Children's Social Care service. Given that Tower Hamlets has the fastest growing children's population in Europe, more children than ever are set to come through Children's Services in the next decade, meaning that Children's Social Care Service will continue to feel the pressure of producing cheaper and better outcomes for families. I firmly believe that our ability to protect children in the borough drives to the core of our responsibilities as a local authority, and events unfolding in the London Borough of Haringey during the course of this review gave a sobering back-drop for our work.

The key aim of the review was to investigate the value of existing Early Intervention services relating to safeguarding, identify any gaps in existing provisions and explore the case for extending the services in these areas.

Members found that there were already numerous examples of excellent practice both within the Council and across partner agencies, and that there was a strong value case in extending early intervention services, both in terms of value for money, and improved outcomes for families and children.

Working on this review underlined to me the importance of targeting the family as a whole in our response to the needs of children, and the working group has made recommendations relating to enhancing services around domestic violence, parental mental health and parental substance abuse. The crucial importance of integrated working was also highlighted in this review, and a number of recommendations have been made relating to improving interfaces between different services and partners to improve communication, and ultimately, the service provided to the families in need.

### **Conclusion**

The timeliness of this review, given the current pressures being placed on Councils across the country to review their safeguarding arrangements, has been most welcome, and I feel the review has been greatly productive in increasing understanding of one of our most fundamental and difficult duties as a council; safeguarding children. From the findings of this review I believe that the dedication of officers and partners in this field will continue to lead to innovation and improved service outcomes for families and children in the community.

The Prosperous Communities portfolio is wide-ranging and covers learning, worklessness and enterprise. My role as a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been to support the Council in creating opportunities and ensuring our residents have the skills and support needed to go into employment and to support people to make the best choices to improve their quality of life.

The starting block to realising a prosperous community is to offer good quality education in schools up to GCSE level to empower young people with the opportunity to go onto further education or employment. Moreover, if we are to achieve a prosperous community then parents will need to be involved more in encouraging young people to do better at school. With this in mind, I wanted to carry out a review that would help support parents and allow them to get more involved in their child's learning.

### **Parental Engagement in Secondary Education**

The Parental Engagement in Secondary Education review focused on how the council and schools support parents to play a more active part in their children's learning. The review recognised that parental engagement is a key determinant of positive outcomes for their children and that good parenting is a major factor in improving children and young people's life chances.

The key aim of the review was to evaluate current practices to improve parental engagement. Therefore the Working Group reviewed the following Tower Hamlets Initiatives;

- Extended School
- Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities
- Transition Information Sessions/ Parent Information Point (PIP)
- Passport to Learning and Targeted workshops for parents of Year 7 learners
- Maths curriculum workshop

Through focus groups with parents, the Working Group found that on the whole provisions offered by the Council are 'good,' but more focus is needed to support hard to reach parents particularly BME parents who face language barriers. Also parents felt that they needed more help and information from schools on best ways to support children during school years. The review recommendations include; improving access to information, more support to access services and improved consultation with parents.

### **Conclusion**

I firmly believe that the Parental Engagement in Secondary Education review has contributed to a very positive year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Recommendations will help to achieve a better partnership between parents and schools that will help realise our aim of creating a prosperous community.

As Scrutiny Lead for A Great Place to Live, my remit covers housing, environment, arts and leisure. Affordable homeownership has been a local concern for some time and I was keen to explore ways of improving access to local homeownership. This is a key issue for our borough because of the huge number of people on our housing waiting list and the cost of properties along with low income level poses a significant challenge for local residents' ability to access affordable homes.

### **Scrutiny Review: Affordable homeownership**

The review focused on ways of increasing access to affordable homeownership for local residents. In considering this, we looked at access including publicity, types of schemes, take-up and considered shared ownership as a current model. The Working Group also explored other models of affordable homeownership including community land trust and shared equity with a view to recommending an introduction of this to increase affordable supply.

We met five times which included a focus group with local developers and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). We also undertook visits to 2 local schemes in Docklands which were particularly useful in considering issues around pricing and layout of current schemes.

This has been an interesting review to work on because of the numbers of RSL partners and developers involved in our discussions. I believe we have come up with recommendations which will help to improve the publicity of the services available for affordable homeownership and introduce newer models to increase affordable supply. A key recommendation we have made is that the Council works with local developers and RSLs to develop more affordable housing through the 'discounted sales models' which we considered during our focus group.

The Community Land Trust Model was discussed in length by the Working Group and we looked at a particular model which we feel can be further explored and have therefore recommended that the Cabinet undertake a feasibility study to consider its full merit.

The review concluded by recognising that in the current climate in Tower Hamlets with all its housing issues, any products which are affordable will possibly only supply small numbers and the demand will always be high. However, we were keen to ensure that we did not accept this as a barrier and continue to test and debate ways of introducing more affordable housing for our residents.

### **Conclusion**

Although the funding arrangements in housing can be complex impacting on a range of things from publicity of schemes to the tenure mix, the Working Group were keen to ensure that we used this review to increase access and supply and a number of recommendations are put forward for this purpose. We hope our review and recommendations add value to the existing work the Council is doing to increase affordable housing and this helps improve the quality of life for local residents.

We all desire for our borough to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full potential, a place where crime is uncommon and where communities can live together in peace. Indeed the Tower Hamlets Community Plan makes specific reference to realizing this as central to achieving a safe and supportive community.

Whilst thinking about this year's work programme, I wanted to focus on a scrutiny review that helped to achieve a community that is safe. Moreover, it was my wish that the review focused on improving outcomes for our youth population. To this end, as Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive, I decided to carry out a review investigating the extent to which young people are misusing alcohol.

### **Smashed, Alcohol Misuse amongst Young People**

The key aims of the review were to look at circumstances that lead young people to drink and misuse alcohol and to explore consequences of misuse. A further aim was to review current enforcement and prevention practices aimed at diverting young people away from alcohol. Therefore, the Working Group reviewed the health effects of alcohol misuse, the effects on crime and performance in school. The Working Group also reviewed the role of Trading Standards and the Police in preventing young people from purchasing alcohol and the role and responsibilities of treatment agencies and community organisations.

The Working Group held meetings and focus groups with representatives from the Council's Community Safety Service, the Police, Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust and Young People. We also considered evidence, case studies and data gathered by Central Government in order to come to our conclusions and recommendations.

The Working Group found that the number of young people drinking alcohol in Tower Hamlets is still low, however increasing all the time. The frustration for the Working Group was that evidence presented on the number of young people drinking was largely anecdotal and therefore could not be substantiated. Moreover, a significant time was spent evaluating the perceived rise in young Bangladeshi drinkers. During the meeting with local community organisations; the Group were told that there *is* a rise in Bangladeshi drinkers.

The review recommendations included; effective promotion of information about sensible drinking and the problems associated with alcohol misuse to young people and parents, strong enforcement and prevention of young people purchasing alcohol and improved focus on health and alcohol education in schools and youth clubs.

### **Conclusion**

I have really enjoyed this year and embraced the many challenges of being the scrutiny lead for Safe and Supportive; I believe recommendations of the Smashed, Alcohol Misuse Amongst Young People review will present further focus to service delivery and increase commitment to preventing young people from misusing alcohol.

As Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets, my remit focuses on achieving the aspirations of building One Tower Hamlets which was introduced through our new Community Plan. The proportion of children living in poverty in Tower Hamlets is higher than elsewhere in England. Therefore, Child poverty is a critical issue locally because on many measures we have high levels of poverty, the biggest driving factor being parental unemployment. The other issue I was keen to explore was how community leadership can contribute to tackling child poverty by establishing a model which brings greater resident involvement into the way we develop services and policies.

### **Scrutiny Review: Child Poverty**

The review focused on using a community leadership model to explore peoples' experiences and barriers to employment and to use this to make recommendations for improving services. In addition to this, the review also looked at ESOL, debt and financial management, child care provision, Employment Strategy, Child Poverty Pledge and Jobcentre Plus.

Working Group Members undertook a number of visits and focus groups which together with in-depth interviews became known as the One Tower Hamlets Interview model because we were able to use the information we obtained to make recommendations which are reflected in the final report. I think the One Tower Hamlets interviews in particular have worked really well to inform policy developments and we have made recommendations to support community leaders to use such a model to bring forth residents views in service development. The review ran concurrently with the development of the 'Tackling Child Poverty Strategy'. We welcomed the key themes identified within the strategy and the opportunity to contribute to this during the duration of the working group review.

It has been a challenging and exciting review to work on and I know the Working Group Members have found the One Tower Hamlets Interview model really useful. I believe we have come up with wide ranging and challenging recommendations focusing on supporting women and families into employment and access to employment support. There are a number of recommendations in the report which require responses from our partner agencies. We have also made a recommendation on using the London Child Poverty Pledge to influence partners to recognise local employment needs.

We noted the complexities of child poverty at the start of the review and were keen to add value to what's in place already given that we now have a Beacon Award for Tackling Child Poverty. The review concluded by recognising that despite the depth of the impact of child poverty locally, there are provisions in place which will attempt to see the cycle of poverty reversed. The review was further evidence that we have to ensure we understand the needs and the barriers that local people face, in order to offer really effective solutions to poverty.

### **Conclusion**

We welcomed the development of the Strategy and the Beacon Award received by the Council on Tackling Child Poverty, The on-going work by the Council and the partnership are addressing some of the key areas which need further work to tackle this important issue. However, we cannot stand still in striving to improve services and the impact it has on very real lives and I hope the community leadership model we have developed through this review is put to use again for the benefit of local residents. Participation in this kind of review is a real benefit to councillors in understanding our community, and will, I hope continue to offer us real help in assessing how effective our public services are.

## **Health Scrutiny Panel**

### **Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton**

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The Health Scrutiny Panel undertakes the Council's functions under the Health and Social Care Act, 2001. The Panel includes members who are co-opted from the Tower Hamlets Involvement Network (THINK) Steering Group to represent patient views. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Dr Amjad Rahi and Myra Garrett from THINK and Ann Edmead Co-opted Member from Future Women Councillors Initiative and John Lee for their contributions. I would also like to thank Councillor Ann Jackson (Vice-Chair) who kindly chaired meetings in my absence.

This was the third year of the four year work programme developed by the Health Scrutiny Panel. We looked to build on the work undertaken in the last 2 years by still retaining our focus on reducing health inequalities. We undertook a Challenge Session in which we were pleased to note the development of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which is an important document that helps us better understand how local health needs are used to inform service planning. A key recommendation arising out of this session was the continuous involvement of Members during the development and scrutiny of the interim findings of the report.

The Panel undertook three service visits this year as part of our Induction process. At the Barkantine Centre Members were given a tour of the facilities available at the new centre. We also visited the Personality Disorder Unit at the East London NHS Foundation Trust and the Barts and the London NHS Trust at their office in the Royal London Hospital. These visits were useful in developing the panel's relationship with the Trusts and understanding of service provision by the NHS.

### **End of Life Care Review**

The key Health Scrutiny review this year looked at End of Life Care focusing on how social care provision of end of life services meet the needs of local people and the effectiveness of co-ordination across health and social care at end of life.

The Health Scrutiny Panel were keen to ensure their work added value to the Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trusts' existing service improvement programme for end of life care provision. We agreed that it would be useful to bring our local knowledge of communities to bear on the wider programme, to provide a check on the robustness of the plans and to be consulted over proposed changes to the way services will be provided in the future. The review also provided a critical friend role in overseeing the Delivering Choice Programme which was piloting the use of Marie Curie toolkit to redesign and improve end of life care services.

The Panel also identified a significant community leadership challenge to promoting wellbeing within the scope of end of life care around the challenges of making talking about death and dying more acceptable and the concept of a planned and or good death.

The recommendations cover a range of areas including the need to improve ways of encouraging further debate and dialogue between service providers and users, their family and carers, extending hospice care in the community, developing a common understanding between all service providers of end of life care and creating a single point of contact for end of life care services. We hope that these recommendations will be implemented quickly and in full and further support the issues identified by the PCT in their improvement programme.



## **Pan-London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Last year's report on Healthcare for London: A Framework for Action included proposals for the development of a stroke strategy and seven hyper-acute stroke centres and the development of trauma networks with three major acute centres. The proposals were underpinned by a clinical case for change for stroke and major trauma services. Authorities across London including from neighbouring Counties convened the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) to prepare a response to the consultation on the proposals.

Both I and Cllr Luffa Begum were nominated to represent the borough on the JOSC and it has been a challenging experience where we have engaged with complex health issues considering both local needs and the need to develop a strategic-level voice on London-wide issues.

The JOSC is still considering evidence from a number of sources including hospitals across London who provide Stroke and Trauma Services and will produce their draft report in June 2009.

## **Organ Donation**

Cllr Bill Turner undertook research and publicity to encourage local BME communities to consider organ donation. An article was placed in East End Life and also sent to other local papers which encouraged more BME people to come forward as organ donors. The article highlighted the need for BME donors with 23% of people currently waiting for a kidney transplant but only 3% of donors from the same background. The article also highlighted the various religious views on organ donation and noted that it was welcomed by all major religions.

## **The Annual Healthcheck**

The Healthcare Commission assesses all NHS Trusts in the UK against 24 Core Standards covering the seven areas of safety, clinical and cost effectiveness, governance, patient focus, accessible and responsive care, care environment and amenities and public health.

The Panel reviewed the Annual Healthcheck Declarations of all three Trusts as part of the Annual Healthcheck process and has provided comments based on evidence gathered over the past year.

The issues raised included the need for continuous engagements of patients in service development, improving customer services at the local acute hospital and continue working to ensure the health trusts employ a workforce that reflect the local community. I am pleased that all the Trusts responded positively to our comments and are taking measures to address them.

## **Conclusion**

It has been another positive and very full year for the Health Scrutiny Panel. We have considered a number of key reports through the formal Panel meetings which included consultation on PCT managed practices and emergency dental services review and annual complaints reports from Bart's and the London NHS Trust and Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust. We have also monitored last year's review on tobacco cessation through an update on progress of implementing our recommendations and are pleased to report the positive work the Council and the PCT have undertaken to implement our recommendations.

## Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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If you want to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets, please contact the Scrutiny Policy Team:

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