

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council
April 2010**



TOWER HAMLETS

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Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

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 other partners, on how those policies and services can be improved.

In Tower Hamlets, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee coordinates all Scrutiny work. It appoints the Vice Chair and six Scrutiny Leads. 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.

Membership

Reflecting the overall political balance of the Council during 2009/10 the Committee's membership comprised six Labour councillors and one each from the Conservative, Respect and Liberal Democrat parties.

As well as the councillors, there are five education co-optee positions in the Committee. In 2009/10 only three of these positions were filled. Among them, there were 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. It is expected that two representatives will be appointed by the Anglican and Roman Catholic Dioceses in early 2010-11.

Scrutiny Chair and Leads

In 2009/10, the Chair of the Committee was Councillor Sirajul Islam. The Chair oversees the work programme of the committee as well as taking lead on monitoring the Council's budget.

Apart from Excellent Public Services, the other five themes which each Scrutiny Lead is responsible for are pillars of the borough's Community Plan. 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 Alex Heslop (Labour) for "Great Place to Live," focusing on improving housing and the environment and providing a wide range of arts and leisure services.
- Cllr Denise Jones (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 Tim Archer (Conservative) 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.

Scrutiny Leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders by conducting in-depth ‘Scrutiny Reviews’, which usually involve several meetings and visits to gather evidence on particular Council services. ‘Scrutiny Challenge Sessions’ are also undertaken by some Scrutiny Leads which are a one off meeting looking at a specific area of concern within the community.

In 2009/10, there were two other non-executive Members who also served on the Committee:

Cllr Abjol Miah
Cllr Stephanie Eaton

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.

An emerging area for development replacing the Healthcare Commission’s Annual Health Check will be the Quality Accounts submitted to the Care Quality Commission where Health Scrutiny will have the opportunity to comment on these. This is an area that the Panel will be looking to develop over the next year.

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 2009/10. 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 Sirajul Islam, Chair

The Overview and Scrutiny arrangements in Tower Hamlets include:

- a single co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- five Scrutiny Leads scrutinising the Community Plan themes and one for Excellent Public Services
- pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports
- performance monitoring by considering the Tower Hamlets Index, Quarterly Strategic Plan & Budget Monitoring report, the Diversity and Equality Action Plan, Corporate Complaints and Members' Enquiries
- a robust call-in procedure
- Holding the Executive to account through Scrutiny Spotlight for Cabinet Members
- A Health Scrutiny Panel to respond to consultation from NHS Trusts

We agreed a challenging and extensive work programme in July 2009 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 amongst 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 & Budget 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 Committee consistently challenged Cabinet Members on areas of underperformance, including anti-social behaviour, provisions for young people and perhaps most importantly on housing. This last area has been subject to a number of full-scale scrutiny reviews the past few years as well as a deputation involving up to 80 local residents who raised their concerns about the Blackwall Reach Regeneration. The committee was determined that the Council continues to explore improvements in housing for local residents.

We also considered the Council's annual Corporate and Social Care Complaints report. All councillors were pleased to see the improved performance in responding to complaints. 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.

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:

- **Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy**
The committee welcomed the strategy and raised a number of issues for Cabinet to consider including mechanisms for bringing intermediate housing within the reach of Borough residents, in accordance with the aim of providing affordable social housing. The committee also noted that development of the borough fringe areas, particularly the Bethnal Green/Hackney border, needed more attention to improve quality of the environment. Members also felt that outdated overcrowding standards were now inappropriate and required updating.
- **Gambling Policy**
The committee considered the Gambling Policy refresh and offered a number of comments for Cabinet's consideration. Members raised concerns at the poor response rate to the consultation in particular the lack of consultation with religious organisations. It was suggested when the policy is reviewed again more extensive consultation be undertaken particularly with Children, School and Families Directorate, Local Area Partnerships and the services of the Council's Consultation and Involvement Team be utilised to ensure greater engagement. The saturation of gambling establishments within certain areas was also highlighted as an area which needed to be considered to ensure those areas do not become hotspot for gambling establishments. There is a need to do some work to highlight how residents can object to these establishments as the Committee felt local residents were not aware of the process.

Other Policy Work

The committee also considered a number of other policy area as part of its work and offered comments and recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

- **Third Sector Strategy**
The Committee welcomed the Third Sector Strategy and stated that transparency and accountability was needed in any allocation of funds to local groups. We considered that it would be helpful to compile a report of historical problems, challenges and mistakes from the past to signpost what needed to be avoided in the future. We recommended that a comprehensive piece of work be undertaken to better understand the types of third sector organisations that exist in Tower Hamlets. We also felt that clarity was needed to ensure geographical equity of service provision.
- **Transport for London (TfL) Red Route Network Investment Plan**
The Committee considered a presentation from representatives from TfL about their investment plans on the Red Route Network in particular within Tower Hamlets. The Committee raised a number of issues with them including issues around length of time it was taking in implementing some schemes, safety issues around Mile End Road and the junction of Whitechapel Road and Vallance Road, the poor investment in the

borough considering we have major roads into the City and also how we can further ensure local views can be better communicated to TfL.

- **Domestic Violence Service – Sustainable Funding**

As part of our monitoring of past scrutiny reviews the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive re-visited the review on Domestic Violence undertaken in 2005/06. One of the issues that were highlighted was around funding for key posts in the service. This included the Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse Worker and the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Service. The Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member who provided assurances that work was on going to secure sustainable funding for these key areas.

- **Car-Free Development Schemes and Parking Permit Arrangements**

At the request of a Committee Member we considered issues around parking arrangements in car free development. Around 20 residents from Gaverick Mews attended the meeting and we received a deputation on impact of the implementation of the policy on residents from this estate. The Committee discussed with the Cabinet Member on how we can better manage implementation of Car Free Developments in the future and resolving confusion around old schemes which were now being implemented. We were assured by the Cabinet Member that he would look into this and inform residents.

Scrutiny of the Budget

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

In July 2009 we considered the Resource Allocation and Budget Review 2010/11 – 2012/13 and supported the Council's approach in recognition of the strong financial management. However, we noted that public finances were severely in deficit and growth in public spending would need to be curtailed from the levels experienced over recent years in order to bring them back into balance. The Committee sought reassurances from the Lead Member that in this instance the Council's budget would be managed carefully to reduce the potential impact on our residents.

In February 2010, we considered Cabinet's budget proposals for 2010/11. 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 overspends in a number of Council Directorates and generally supported the budget proposals, in particular for freezing Council Tax in 2010/11. The Committee also welcomed the proposed efficiency savings and additional investments proposed.

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 23 Cabinet reports (compared to 38 last year). Among these were:

- Children's Services Capital Spend
- Disposal of various Council owned properties
- Blackwall Reach Regeneration
- Ocean Estate Regeneration
- Leisure Facilities strategy
- Overcrowding Reduction Strategy

- Improving Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Poplar Baths Development Plans

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 was consistent to last year and is a significant decrease from previous years.

Report Called-in	O&S Decision
Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project	Confirmed
Consideration of Individual Case for Severance	Referred back to Cabinet
Ideas Stores Strategy	Confirmed
Adoption of Street and Building Naming and Numbering Policy	Confirmed
Proposed Acquisition of Leasehold Interest at 585-593 Commercial Road, E1 and Temporary Relocation of Leven Road Car Pound	Confirmed

Debate of the call-ins was robust and rigorous. We confirmed all but one of 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 Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project the Committee made 4 recommendations to improve resident engagement and ensure they benefit from the regeneration which have been taken on by the Cabinet and updates have been provided to the Committee informing us on the development of this area.

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, including the 80 residents who attended the call-in involving Blackwall Reach. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny and highlight the important role it has within the borough.

Co-opted and Appointed Representatives

There has been some difficulty in appointing an Anglican and Catholic Diocese to the committee although a new policy framework is currently being drafted to ensure that a fully functioning committee is in place for 2010-11. We organised an Induction Session for current co-opted members and considered how we could develop their role and help them be more effective. We also welcomed a number of local residents onto many of 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.

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.

In developing the first monitoring report all the Scrutiny Lead Members revisited a review within their portfolio area. This was undertaken through 1-2-1 meetings with Lead Officers from the service area of the review. This provided Members a useful way of monitoring the implementation of recommendations, identify key outcomes as a result of the review and also consider any difficulties around implementing recommendations. The details of these discussions are summarised below:

- Councillor Denise Jones revisited the Domestic Violence Review undertaken in 2005/06 and reported that progress had been made against all the recommendations. She highlighted the outcomes from the review were the production of the Domestic Violence booklets to raise awareness, the training of the Council's Customer Contact Centre and One Stop Shops staff to recognise Domestic Violence. A key concern she highlighted was funding to some of the specialist Domestic Violence services provided by third sector organisations.
- Councillor Alex Heslop considered the review on Leaseholders undertaken in 2006/07. He reported that of the 19 recommendations are all either completed or partially completed. This review has significantly improved the services received by Leaseholders particularly with an extensive staff training programme being developed and improved engagement with Leaseholders. In August 2009 Tower Hamlets Homes also implemented a decentralised housing management system which provided Leaseholders greater access to key officers and solve problems more quickly.
- Councillor Ann Jackson revisited the Interpreting and Translating Service Challenge Session held in 2007/08. One of the key issues highlighted by this session was the link between English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision and the demand for interpreting and translating services in Tower Hamlets. Progress had been made against all the recommendations and significant funding had been secured for ESOL provision in the borough through the Working Neighbourhood Fund and the Council also allocating additional funding. There is also a strategic review taking place of interpreting and translation services which will support service planning and delivery.
- Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar reviewed the Graduate Unemployment Review undertaken in 2006/07. He highlighted that progress has been made against all but one of the recommendations, which is due to the lack of funding. There has been a positive impact from this review for graduates. There are opportunities for graduates to be employed in the Council and other places through schemes developed with the Partnership.
- Councillor Bill Turner considered the review on the Use of Consultants undertaken in 2007/08 and reported that progress has been made against all of the recommendations. The review has had a positive impact on the service with greater assurance that consultants are used in the right circumstances and their outputs are monitored and managed correctly. Furthermore Directorates are required to submit monthly reports to the Corporate Director of Resources on their use of consultants. Directorate Management Teams reviews the use of consultants on a regular basis.
- Councillor Tim Archer revisited the review on Access to GP and Dentistry Service undertaken in 2006/07 and reported that all the recommendations had been implemented or there was on-going work. There has been significant improvement in access to GP and Dentistry Services since this review was undertaken.

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 Reducing Worklessness Amongst Young Adults 18-24 and Youth Offending reviews. More detail of these is included in the reports by the Scrutiny Leads.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 includes provision for CCfA that came into force on 1st April 2009. This means the Council is now under statutory obligation to provide Members the opportunity to refer to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) any local government matter where other methods of resolution have been exhausted.

OSC agreed a local proposal for implementing CCfA which includes pooling together the joint information gleaned from complaints, petitions, members enquiries and FOI requests into one performance report that can be used both corporately and by councillors to spot patterns and problem-solve on behalf of the community. This Performance Digest report will be prepared at six-monthly intervals for use at OSC to consider issues strategically and a local version would be presented to LAP Steering Group Members. The combination of the two would aim to ensure that both neighbourhood and borough-wide aspects are covered.

The Strengthening Community Leadership Scrutiny Review led by the Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets tested a mock performance digest report and how CCfA can be used by councillors to problem solve on behalf of their constituents. They have made a number of recommendations to improve the CCfA process which are detailed in the Scrutiny Lead's section of this report. A report outlining the CCfA proposals has been considered by all the Partnership Delivery Groups. While supporting the proposals the Groups were anxious that CCfA should not replicate work being undertaken elsewhere and not create a bureaucratic burden for partner organisations. They welcomed the opportunity to utilise the Performance Digest as a problem solving tool and use Members' community leadership role to develop and improve services. Similar discussions have also been held at the Health Scrutiny Panel about combining the complaints information from each of the three local NHS Trusts to create a more sophisticated tool for Members to help make improvement in the health sector. This was also discussed at the LAP Steering Group Conference in January 2010. There was a great deal of enthusiasm amongst LAP Steering Group Members to get involved in local problem solving and holding services to account at a local level.

Strengthening Local Democracy

The Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation paper was published in July 2009 proposing giving councillors greater power to scrutinise the spending and decisions of local service providers, extending scrutiny to issues not directly related to LAA targets. Scrutiny will also be extended to a wider range of partners e.g. utility companies and sub-regional partnerships. Our response to the consultation supports the principle of extending the scrutiny powers beyond the Council and health services as more and more work of non-executive councillors is cross-cutting and goes beyond organisational boundaries – and most residents are not interested in these boundaries when they raise concerns with their elected representatives.

However we recognise the need for this to be proportionate, the complexity of making it happen and the need to ensure it delivers something useful.

In considering these 'new' powers it is worth reminding ourselves that there is already engagement from local partners in a number of ways. For instance, over the last three years the Borough Commander has always attended OSC to answer questions as part of the Lead Member for Cleaner, Safer, Greener's Scrutiny Spotlight. All of the reviews in this year's Work Programme involve partners and relate to the partnership improvement agenda identified in the Community Plan.

The Communities and Local Government Department have recently published their response to the consultation which notes overwhelming support for extending the scrutiny powers beyond LAA partners. The Government has sought the earliest opportunity to implement these proposals to broaden the powers of local authority scrutiny committees and extend them to cover a wide range of external bodies. A Private Member's Bill was considered by Parliament before the election but did not manage to go through in time. As part of the discussion with the Community Plan Delivery Groups on CCfA the paper also asked the Partnership on how we could enhance the role of scrutiny within the Partnership. It was recognised that scrutiny had already been working with many of the partners over the last few years. There are opportunities to further strengthen this through developing the Scrutiny Leads role in the Delivery Groups, managing expectations of all stakeholders involved in scrutiny reviews and ensuring monitoring and follow up on review work is further developed to demonstrate the impact of scrutiny. It was also noted that scrutiny offers the Partnership the forum to discuss and resolve difficult issues with Members and local residents.

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 Strengthening Community Leadership, Reducing Childhood Obesity and improving housing in the Private Rented Sector.

This is an exciting time to be part of scrutiny with the emphasis the government has placed on strengthening local community leadership and increasing the involvement of local residents in the democratic process. I believe our work this year has equipped us to strengthen the impact of the committee in the future.

I was pleased to continue with my role for Excellent Public Services in 2009-2010. This year saw my involvement in two key scrutiny challenge sessions: Dangerous dogs and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) both struck a chord with the community and were very well attended by our local residents.

Dangerous Dogs

A challenge session was arranged to highlight the issue of dangerous dogs and to consider residents' views about the subject. Over 70 residents attended the session that included presentations from the Metropolitan Police, the Council's Animal Warden Service and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

The key aims were to increase Members understanding of the issue, to consider and evaluate the Council's approach to dealing with the rise of dangerous dogs, to provide residents with an opportunity to express their views and concerns and assist in developing recommendations for future approaches to dealing with this issue.

The members of the session noted that it had become a growing trend to use dogs as a weapon to settle scores between gangs, and for organised dog fighting. The Council's Animal Warden Service had taken in over 170 stray dogs since 1st April 2008, and 140 of them were Staffordshire bull terriers or similar crossbreeds. Of these, it was reported that 105 had to be put down.

It was argued during this session that it was important to tailor recommendations to tackle irresponsible dog ownership so that it incorporates both education and enforcement elements. Enforcement action was viewed as a more serious consideration. However, Members and residents argued that in some serious instances where animal cruelty or human safety needs to be protected, it may be the only option.

The recommendations covered a wide range of areas including the need for the Animal Warden Service to work with schools to develop interactive activities for children of all ages, encouraging them to think about dog welfare and responsible ownership as well as promoting responsible pet ownership at local community events and through East End Life. Moreover, it was emphasised that a partnership amongst Animal Welfare Officers, the Council, Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Registered Social Landlords, Status Dogs Unit, the Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers and the RSPCA be officially set up to work together on dog welfare and ownership issues.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

The second scrutiny challenge session I oversaw looked at ESOL provision in the borough with a particular focus on Tower Hamlet College. ESOL provision remains the largest single curriculum area offered by the College. 43% of all adult students are on ESOL courses. Provision is offered from Entry Level through to Level 2. In June 2009 the College commenced a consultation with staff and Trade Unions regarding proposals for cost savings of £1.75 million for the academic year 2009/10. The consultation paper highlighted the financial and educational challenges facing the College and the inevitable shortfalls that these cuts would bring. The important need for ESOL provision within the borough is well understood by all the key stakeholders. The aim of this session was to develop Members' understanding on the

impact of the ESOL cuts occurring at Tower Hamlets College and to consider the current and future provision of ESOL services in the borough.

At the challenge session, evidence was received from the University and College Union, an ESOL lecturer from Tower Hamlets College, the Head of Lifelong Learning and the Skills for Life Manager at Tower Hamlets Council. Two documents were also tabled by the Learning and Skills Council and the Principle of Tower Hamlets College. Discussions centred on national cuts in ESOL provisions which have impacted on Tower Hamlets as well as the future of local ESOL provisions.

Five recommendations were devised during the session. These include investigating the issuing of bogus Skills for Life certificates and ESOL qualifications by some private colleges in the borough and lobbying the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Mayor of London for further entry level ESOL provisions.

I believe that the issues around ESOL provisions and the concerns raised by both residents and staff from the college are increasingly important to our borough especially considering that half the total population are from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities and the fact that many new communities will be moving into the borough which will contribute to a changing profile over the next ten years.

Conclusion

These challenge sessions were well attended by councillors and residents highlighting their importance locally. I hope our recommendations support policy developments in these areas and address residents concerns. Finally I would like to thank all those who participated in these challenge sessions and shared their invaluable experiences and also contributed immensely to the final recommendations.

Prosperous Community

Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar

As the Scrutiny Lead for a Prosperous Community my portfolio ranges from education, employment and skills, economic development and reducing poverty in the communities of Tower Hamlets. I was keen to explore worklessness amongst young adults in the borough as this is a key issue for local residents. The borough has more than two jobs available for every resident but yet we have one of the highest concentrations of economic inactivity in the country. The importance of worklessness locally is also highlighted in our Community Plan where it is seen as a key priority for the Partnership.

Reducing Worklessness amongst Young Adults 18-24

The review focused on what the Council and its partners can do to reduce worklessness in the borough and what early intervention methods can be implemented to deter a future generation of worklessness.

From the outset of this review I was very keen to get resident involvement and hence three local residents were co-opted onto the working group. Furthermore, of the seven sessions that we undertook, two of these included focus groups with young adults who are economically inactive and living in the borough. This gave Members first hand experience of some of the barriers that young adults face.

We gathered evidence from a range of different stakeholders including national and regional organisations including the London Development Agency and the Host Boroughs Unit. In addition, we undertook a workshop with eight third sector organisations and discussed the issue with a number of different Council services such as Skillsmatch and the HUB.

Our recommendations included increasing employment opportunities for women, ex-offenders and the most vulnerable, and strengthening both the role of the third sector and community leaders in reducing worklessness. We were also keen to introduce greater careers education in primary schools and encourage all young people to leave compulsory education with an employment and skills qualification.

Conclusion

The timeliness of this review, given the recent recession has been most welcome. Reducing worklessness is a complex issue within the community but I am convinced that the working group's recommendations can improve the opportunities available to young adults locally to secure employment and in turn create further prosperity for all our residents.

My portfolio as the Scrutiny Lead for A Great Place to Live includes aspects ranging from housing and development, environment, the arts and leisure. To build on previous years scrutiny review on housing I decided to look at the important area of housing in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), as this is an area which has in the past year or so received a tremendous amount of negative publicity. The borough has some of the best PRS properties in the country but it also has some of the worst properties. It is an issue which a number of residents have raised with councillors and with the growing number of PRS properties in the borough an issue we could improve.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS)

The PRS review primarily looked at improving the health aspect of those residing in private rented housing and in particular the role of landlords. The reviews key aims included:

- To analyse issues facing tenants of the Private Rented Sector
- To identify gaps in the support available to tenants of the Private Rented Sector
- To examine issues that may effect landlords who are renting out to tenants
- To analyse the growing number of private tenants of council leaseholders and how the council should interact with such tenants

The working group heard evidence from a range of national organisations such as the National Landlords Association, Praxis and Crises. In addition, we heard from Tower Hamlets Homes, Queen Mary College and Registered Social Landlords. Furthermore a number of Council services also presented on aspects of the PRS.

We have made a number of recommendations including the need to develop a new Private Housing Strategy for the borough. A key feature of the review was also to support and strengthen good landlords in the borough and in turn drive out poor landlords. The working group acknowledged the importance of the PRS and the need to utilise the sector more. We believe through the evidence that there is a need to publicise both the Landlords Forum more and those Landlords who are accredited. The working group also believes strongly that considering the high number of leaseholders who are sub-leasing their properties, the Council should actively explore developing a full management service for these landlords.

Conclusion

The PRS is a very important sector within the borough and one that needs to be better utilised. We hope our review and recommendations will help to improve the quality of life for residents who reside in this sector by adding value to the existing work of the Council and its partners in strengthening the PRS.

Safe and Supportive

Cllr Denise Jones

The aim of the safe and supportive theme is to create a Tower Hamlets where crime is rare. It is to be tackled in an effective manner, so that all communities are able to live in peace. The Community Plan recognises that it is the most disadvantaged people who are often most at risk of becoming both offenders and victims of crime. With this in mind, I have used this year's work program to focus on ways the Council and its partners can support some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Therefore, I have led a review into youth offending and a Scrutiny Challenge Session into anti-bullying initiatives at schools.

Youth Offending: Supporting Vulnerable Young People

Youth crime is a concern that residents continue to raise with Councillors. It also affects not only victims and perpetrators but their families and the wider community. This review aimed to find feasible solutions to preventing youth crime. The review examined the current preventative initiatives used by the Young Offenders Team (YOT), the national agenda on youth crime, issues that could lead to criminal activity such as lack of housing and the reasons that young people become involved in youth crime.

The Working Group visited Huntercombe Youth Offending Institute and Thames Youth Court, interviewed young people who were on a number of different preventative programmes run by the YOT, held a focus group with parents of young offenders, and had meetings with the Council's Youth and Community service and YOT, the Police, the Youth Justice Board and a local Magistrate. We then considered this evidence alongside the national evidence.

It was clear to us that there is no one cause for youth offending or re-offending. We found that the borough's YOT was performing really well compared to our statistical neighbours and worked well with partners. However, we felt there were areas which we could improve and our recommendations include ways youth offenders could be properly resettled after conviction, how we could re-engage young people with the education system to lessen their risk of offending, supporting families to deal with young offenders and developing our frontline staff to support the YOT in helping young people avoid offending.

Anti-bullying Challenge Session

The stress for victims of bullying can have far reaching effects on their personal and social development. It can also impact on the educational achievement of them and their peers. Therefore I wanted to have a challenge session which considered our local anti-bullying initiatives and how this compared to other areas. We noted that substantial amount of work had been undertaken in the borough's schools and there are best practice examples of anti-bullying work. We have made six recommendations on developing resilience to bullying in the borough and this includes developing specific work around homophobic, disability and cyber bullying and working with parents and third sector organisations to raise awareness.

Conclusion

I have enjoyed being the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive this year. It has allowed me to explore challenging issues that affect vulnerable members of our community. I believe both these issues can have a huge impact on the future of our young people and support our aim of developing a safe and cohesive community.

As Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets, my remit focuses on ensuring Tower Hamlets is a place people feel a part of and are able to freely live in. To achieve this it is vital that there is a strong element of community leadership within Tower Hamlets. Community leadership ensures that the community are involved in the decision making and that Councillors are able to promote the well being of their area. Last year, I led a review into Child Poverty where we successfully developed a model of community leadership which enabled councillors to identify residents who collectively might represent the diversity of Tower hamlets and interview them about their experiences of child poverty. In developing a better understanding of our local residents needs we were able influence policy and service development. Therefore, in an attempt to explore how community leadership could be strengthened, I decided to carry on the work we had started in the Child Poverty review and have undertaken a review into this important area.

Scrutiny Review: Strengthening Local Community Leadership

This review aimed to further develop Members awareness of the national drivers which are trying to strengthen the leadership part of their roles, question how we could scrutinise our partners and test the community leadership model of Councillor Call for Action (CCfA).

The Working Group found that there were already a number of initiatives in place to allow local residents to take a more active role in their community such as Council Committees, Local Area Partnership structures and other forums such as the Interfaith Forum, the LGBT Community Forum or Pan Disability Panel. However, there are a number of things the Council could do to bring democracy further to the local community and improve the working relationship between Members and their constituents.

To this end, the Working Group made a number of recommendations in three key areas. The first was to look at how the Council could develop a new model of community leadership. The Working Group felt that the proposals developed for Councillor Call for Action offered a real opportunity for Councillors and residents to take an active role in problem-solving. The second was around improving resident participation through better communications and systems. The final area was to look at improving engagement of Councillors and residents through the Partnership, which included a recommendation that ward councillors have an allocated budget.

Conclusion

I was grateful for the opportunity to carry out this interesting review. I feel that if these recommendations are implemented we will be able to improve the state of democracy in Tower Hamlets. It is through such improvement that, as a Council, we will be able to ensure that the services we offer to our residents are what they need and want.

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) to represent patient views as well as our health partners at NHS Tower Hamlets, East London NHS Foundation Trust and Barts and the London NHS Trust.

This was the final year of the four-year work programme developed by the Health Scrutiny Panel. We looked to build on the work undertaken in the last three years by retaining the focus on reducing health inequalities.

Scrutiny Review: Reducing Childhood Obesity – Increasing the availability of healthy choices

The key health scrutiny review this year looked at reducing childhood obesity with a focus on promoting healthy eating by increasing the availability of and access to healthy food choices and reducing the availability of and access to foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt.

Tower Hamlets has the 3rd highest level of childhood obesity in the country. It is the only London borough to be awarded 'healthy town' status as part of the Government's Change 4 Life initiative.

The Health Scrutiny Panel were keen to ensure that their work added value to existing work that had taken place in the borough on tackling obesity. The Panel considered how the Council might directly address the problem with the proliferation of fast-food outlets, particularly in the vicinity of schools, and the quality of the food they provide.

In carrying out the review the Group looked at whether local or national legislation such as the Sustainable Communities Act or the London Acts could help to limit the further spread of fast food outlets and examined the lettings policies of public sector landlords and Registered Social Landlords with regards to fast food outlets to identify what action can be taken. We also examined the possibility of Tower Hamlets offering healthy free school meals for all and how we can increase children's access to healthy breakfast clubs through extended schools.

The working group met three times to collect evidence from a range of sources and key stakeholders, including Tower Hamlets Planning Team and Children, Schools and Families Directorate. The Group also carried out focus groups with families.

Health for North East London – Joint Overview Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)

Health for North East London (H4NEL) is the NHS programme review, run on behalf of the north east London's Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and acute hospital trusts. The aim of the health for north east London consultation are to significantly improve the health of thousands of patients and ensure the NHS delivers the best possible care by taking advantage of new medical developments and improving the way it delivers care to patients. It intends to do this by bringing some services closer to people's homes and centralise others to provide better specialist care.

Cllr Sirajul Islam, Cllr Ann Jackson and myself were nominated to represent the borough on the Inner North East London JOSC with Members from the London Boroughs of Hackney, Newham and the City of London. We considered and responded to the proposals set out in the

PCT consultation document, and examined whether the Health for North East London proposals would deliver better healthcare for the people of North East London. The JOSC had the opportunity to collect evidence from clinical specialists, the London Ambulance Service, Transport for London and service users to reach its conclusions.

The public consultation for H4NEL ends on 22nd March 2010 and the INEL JOSC will submit its report with recommendations on 14th April 2010.

Evaluation of the 4 year programme

As the Health Scrutiny Panel's four-year work programme approached its end. It was agreed in October 2009 that it would be beneficial for an external evaluation. The evaluation was based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's principles of good scrutiny and tested views from across the authority and its partners on the effectiveness of the four-year programme. The bulk of the evaluation took place in January and early February 2010. The approach was based on a review of extensive documentation from the Council and all health partners; a range of interviews with Members, council officers and health partner's personnel as well as an observation of the Health Scrutiny Panel meeting on 26th January 2010.

It is an important piece of work identifying both strengths and weaknesses as well as providing recommendations for improvements to the Panel as we look to the 2010/2011 programme.

The evaluation recognises that Tower Hamlets has built strong foundations for its health scrutiny function but there are improvements that need to be made. Particularly in relation to improving the partnership approach to health scrutiny and developing the Health Scrutiny Panel's abilities and Member's community leadership role. The suggestions will assist Members and all health partners to make the journey as one contributor in the report quotes "from good to great."

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 NHS Tower Hamlets Commissioning Strategic Plan and annual complaints reports from Bart's and the London NHS Trust and NHS Tower Hamlets. We have also monitored review from previous years through updates on progress of implementing our recommendations and are pleased to report the positive work the Council and the NHS Tower Hamlets have undertaken to implement our recommendations.

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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

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