

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 1 JULY 2008

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

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Asad (Chair)
Councillor Shahed Ali
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Waiseul Islam
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor Bill Turner (Vice-Chair)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Alibor Choudhury – (Lead Member, Employment and Skills)
Councillor Joshua Peck – (Lead Member, Resources and Performance)

Officers Present:

Suki Binjal – (Interim Legal Services Manager)
Paul Evans – (Interim Corporate Director Development & Renewal)
Afazul Hoque – (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny and Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Michael Keating – (Acting Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive's)
Claire Symonds – (Service Head, Customer Access)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Oliur Rahman.

Councillor Bill Turner expressed concern that only one of the Committee's co-opted members was present at the meeting and noted in particular that the representative of the Roman Catholic Diocese had not attended a number of the Committee's meetings. The Service Head, Democratic Services undertook to draw this to the attention of the Diocese.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Committee noted that Councillor Shirley Houghton was present at the meeting on 10th June 2008 but this was not recorded in the draft minutes.

RESOLVED

That subject to the inclusion of Councillor Shirley Houghton in the list of 'Other Councillors Present', the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 10th June 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

In relation to the clarification sought by Councillor Stephanie Eaton at minute 5.1 ('Terms of Reference') the Service Head, Democratic Services reported that the Police & Justice Act 2006 required all local authorities to have a crime and disorder committee with scrutiny powers. This does not have to be a separate committee solely for that purpose and the Council had agreed to the recommendation of the Constitution Working Party that for the time being the Police & Justice Act scrutiny functions should be incorporated into the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Regulations were still awaited on the detailed operation of the proposed 'councillor/community call for action' and other scrutiny elements of the 2006 Act and the subsequent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

There were no requests to submit petitions.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

There were no requests to submit deputations.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no decisions 'called in' from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11th June 2008.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT: LEAD MEMBER

Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Lead Member for Employment and Skills, gave a presentation on the key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from his portfolio. Councillor Choudhury informed the Committee that his was a challenging portfolio as many complex and interrelated factors were at play in

relation to worklessness and the skills deficit. Only 54% of the adult working-age population were actually in work and the number of 16 to 24 year olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) in Tower Hamlets was double the London average. The unemployment rate in the borough had remained high for the past 15 years. However the problem was not a shortage of jobs in the borough, rather a substantial skills shortage resulting in local people not being able to access the jobs that were available. Generational worklessness was also a factor.

It would be crucial to make the most of investment opportunities in the City Fringe and Docklands and to address the wider range of interrelated social issues including housing and health. Opportunities were also presented by cross-directorate co-operation and collaboration with other and agencies.

Against this context, Councillor Choudhury outlined a range of strategies and initiatives through which the authority was seeking to tackle the problems outlined, highlighting areas of particular success. Councillor Choudhury then described what he saw as the way forward and short-, medium- and long-term objectives to exploit the opportunities available. He thanked the Committee for their support and stated that he would require the support of colleagues in progressing this area of work.

The Chair thanked Councillor Choudhury for his presentation and invited questions from Members of the Committee.

Councillor A A Sardar enquired as to timescales to deliver the objectives outlined. Cllr Choudhury referred to the short-, medium- and long-term objectives outlined in his presentation and stated that these represented periods of 6, 12 and 36+ months respectively.

Councillor Ann Jackson asked what Councillor Choudhury intended to do differently from previous years. Councillor Choudhury stated that he intended to work closely at grass roots level; to seek to improve the range of jobs accessible to local people; and to focus on the opportunities presented by section 106 funds to improve training and access to jobs. He would seek to involve the third sector and foster a co-ordinated approach focussing on outcomes and sustainable provision.

Councillor Shiria Khatun asked how the opportunities available in developments such as Canary Wharf could be opened up to local people. She also referred to the training opportunities presented by the hospitality trade centred on Brick Lane; and to the provision that existed currently to assist young people in the transition from education to employment. Finally Councillor Khatun asked the Lead Member for his assessment of the current utilisation of the Local Labour in Construction (LLIC) service and the developing community hubs.

Councillor Choudhury stated that he did not have full statistics to hand but the community hubs were providing services in line with the borough plans. LLIC was fairly well used and had contractual links with most training agencies but

was not the only provider. He agreed that there was a key need to support young people in the transition to the world of work and to maximise the corporate social responsibility of local employers. The Cultural Olympiad presented an opportunity to link the west and east of the borough through the High Street 2012 initiative.

Paul Evans, Interim Corporate Director, Development and Renewal, added that provision for 14-19 year olds should benefit from the increasing emphasis now being given by Government to Local Authorities taking a lead in this area, which would enable the work to be sharper, more focussed and effective.

Councillor Eaton drew Councillor Choudhury's attention to the Scrutiny Review on Graduate Unemployment previously undertaken. She also expressed disappointment at the quality of many of the jobs available through Skillsmatch; suggested that the Council could look at provision to support employers in enabling people with disabilities to enter work; and raised the importance promoting the rights of employees in industries such as construction and hospitality. Finally, Councillor Eaton raised the issue of conversion of qualifications which could be difficult or expensive especially for many people coming to this country from eastern Europe.

Councillor Choudhury thanked Councillor Eaton for her suggestions. He endorsed her comments regarding the importance of employment rights and protection and stated that he would be working with the trade unions in this regard. In relation to the conversion of qualifications Councillor Choudhury was aware of this issue and the lost opportunities resulting and would be looking at ways of addressing this.

Councillor Shahed Ali referred to the longer term objective to open a flagship recruitment, training and enterprise centre in the heart of docklands. He asked how the Council could ensure this was more successful than previous such initiatives for example by the LDDC in the 1980s. Councillor Ali also asked (i) whether schools could do more to prepare students for employment by revising subjects such as woodwork, cookery and car mechanics; (ii) how many people had moved into full-time employment through LLIC; and (iii) how the Council could best ensure that as many local people as possible gain employment on the preparations for the 2012 Olympics.

Councillor Choudhury stated that he would be reviewing the statistics on the effectiveness of training providers including LLIC but his initial impression was encouraging. In relation to young people leaving school he would be looking at how effective the careers guidance service was and he would take into account the points raised by Cllr Ali.

In relation to the flagship project planned for Heron Quays, the Interim Corporate Director, Development and Renewal, stated that in his view the larger employers and agencies involved were now far more positive and clearer on the economic benefits of engagement with the local community and he was therefore more confident that the Council's proposals would be positively received.

Councillor Bill Turner suggested that particular attention needed to be paid to the quality of employment opportunities and awareness of the rights of employees within certain industries and/or groups of employees. He also felt there should be further work on the training and employment profile of people with learning difficulties, who were often in low paid or menial roles which may not offer genuine training or work experience opportunities. Finally Councillor Turner referred to the possible adverse effects on local businesses and communities of Home Office changes to visa regulations for skilled persons.

Councillor Ann Jackson expressed concern that as well as seeking to equip local people to get jobs, attention should also be paid to encouraging employers to see the benefits of employing more local people and especially recruiting them from school/college and providing opportunities for training and development within the organisation.

The Chair asked about what work to look at levels of worklessness amongst women in the borough which was particularly high in some local communities. Councillor Choudhury confirmed that that work was underway to analyse the demographic information. It was true that there was a high level of worklessness amongst Bangladeshi women in particular. Once the analysis was complete a draft strategy was being prepared to address this issue.

The Chair thanked Councillor Choudhury for his presentation and for answering the questions of members.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

8.1 Corporate Complaints and Social Care Complaints - Annual Report

Councillor Joshua Peck, Lead Member for Resources and Performance, introduced the report which contained a summary of complaints received by the Council in the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 through the Corporate Complaints Procedure, the Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care Complaints Procedures and those received and determined by the Local Government Ombudsman in the same period.

In relation to Corporate Complaints, although the overall number of complaints received was slightly higher than in the previous year, there were significant reductions in Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints, demonstrating lower escalation rates.

For Adults and Children's Social Care Complaints, which now came under new statutory procedures, significant improvements had been achieved in response times to complaints. The main area where complaints had increased was in relation assessment decisions and this was likely to be due to the increased focus within the department on the consistent application of the Council's eligibility criteria for community care services and the

implementation of the policy decision taken in the budget setting for 2007/08 in relation to older people's services.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton referred to discussion at the Standards Committee which had requested further information on the apparently high number of complaints, both received and upheld at Stage 2, within Housing Technical Services and the relatively long time taken to resolve these. Councillor Eaton was concerned that this information should be available to Members.

Councillor Ann Jackson echoed Cllr Eaton's concerns and had requested further information on this matter at the Standards Committee. She also referred to the breakdown of Stage 1 complaints by ward and LAP which showed particularly high levels in LAPs 1 and 5. Councillor Jackson enquired as to the reasons for this and how it was being addressed.

Councillor Peck noted the points made and in relation to Housing Technical Services reported that there was a focus on improvement in this area following the establishment of the ALMO. Regarding the LAP/ward breakdown some further information would be required. Currently there was exception reporting to Performance Review Group by directorate and Councillor Peck would look at whether this could be further broken down by LAP/ward.

In response to a question from Councillor Shahed Ali, Councillor Peck reported that the increase in complaints within the Adults Health and Wellbeing directorate was in part the result of the transfer into that directorate of the Homelessness Services.

Councillor Shiria Khatun asked how the ethnicity information of complainants was collected. Councillor Peck stated that a monitoring form was used alongside verbal questions to telephone complainants. Members raised concern over the disproportionately low number of complaints from BME residents and users. Councillor Peck reported that work was underway to raise awareness amongst the BME communities of the complaints procedures.

In response to a question from Councillor Waiseul Islam, Councillor Peck stated that he was confident that the preparations for the formation of the ALMO had retained a focus on improving performance and service quality.

Councillor Bill Turner felt that it would be useful for the report to contain more qualitative, as well as quantitative information. He also asked whether the complaints arising from the outcome of assessments related in the main to the provision offered or to the refusal of an assessment. Councillor Peck undertook to raise this with the officers as appropriate.

Councillor Turner also referred to complaints to the local health trusts and wondered whether it would be beneficial for the Council to share best practice and/or for those organisations to be brought into the Members' Enquiry

system as was the case for RSLs. Councillor Peck undertook to bring this to the attention of Councillor Sirajul Islam as the Lead Member with responsibility for Members' Enquiries.

The Chair thanked Councillor Peck for his attendance and presentation and for answering the question of Members.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

9. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

9.1 Verbal updates from Scrutiny Leads

Scrutiny Lead Members provided verbal updates on their respective work programmes as follows:

One Tower Hamlets

Councillor Ann Jackson reported that the main area of work initially would be a review on child poverty. She expected that by the end of the week the key issues would be identified to focus on following a meeting to discuss the topic with the relevant services. The review would be conducted using different formats to the conventional review meetings and would emphasise the role of Members as community leaders to research and lead smaller working groups to formulate recommendations.

Councillor Jackson intended also to carry out some work looking at the role of Members as elected community leaders, working with diverse communities and individuals to promote awareness of the role of Members and the democratic process in general.

Safe and Supportive Community

Councillor Shiria Khatun reported that she would be leading a review of alcohol misuse amongst young people. The review would be titled 'Smashed' and work had already commenced on the scoping document and identifying dates for the review sessions. Scrutiny officers were working on a questionnaire which would be sent to all secondary schools and involvement had been secured from St Hilda's and Docklands Outreach. The Youth Service was working to involve the Young Mayor or his deputy and publicity would be undertaken to ensure that local residents are aware of the work.

Prosperous Community

Councillor A. A. Sardar reported that he was working with Scrutiny officers to research possible topics for a review. Possibilities included education for

looked after children; parental engagement; city academies; and children's centres. Councillor Sardar would be meeting the Corporate Director, Children's Services next week to progress this work.

Healthier Community

Councillor Stephanie Eaton reported that Health Scrutiny Panel Members were taking part in a series of induction visits to all three NHS trusts in the borough. Current areas of work included:

- Finalising priorities within the work programme;
- Agreeing the draft Health Scrutiny protocol which sets out working arrangements between Trusts, other health stakeholders and the Council; and
- Developing the scope of this year's main Health Scrutiny Review which is looking at 'End of Life Care'.

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee looking at Healthcare for London would be reconvening in October 2008 and would be looking at issues including Social Care.

A Great Place to Live

Councillor Waiseul Islam reported that his scrutiny review would focus on affordable housing. Much could be covered within the scope of this review, which would focus on alleviating the pressures on social housing; on different models of affordable home ownership; and possibly on the planning process and how this can best be exploited for the benefit of the community.

Councillor Islam also reported that he had recently attended a seminar on Housing: The Credit Crunch which had been useful in understanding the national context of the housing situation as well as the local situation and possible solutions for affordable home ownership that would inform the review. Work had started to draft the scoping document for the review.

Excellent Public Services

Councillor Bill Turner reported that he had been in discussion with officers in relation to possible review topics. He would be meeting with Scrutiny officers on 7th July to finalise the year's work plan which would most likely focus on the customer service aspects.

Scrutiny Officers had also been in discussion with officers from Finance and Performance Management regarding how the performance and budget management aspects of the portfolio could be made more robust.

Finally, Councillor Turner was keen to look at the role of cafes and similar establishments in the borough as shared community spaces playing a role in promoting community cohesion, and to investigate the economic and other factors that might threaten their viability.

RESOLVED

That the updates provided by the Scrutiny Lead Members be noted.

10. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) CABINET PAPERS

Draft pre-decision questions for submission to the Cabinet Meeting were circulated for Members' consideration.

In relation to Cabinet Agenda item 8.1 (LTGDC Draft Bromley-by-Bow Land Use Design Brief), Councillor Shiria Khatun suggested that draft questions 3 and 4 be merged into one question.

On the same agenda item, the Chair suggested that draft question 2 (regarding the inclusion of a Muslim burial ground in the brief) should not be submitted as the matter had already been considered by the Cabinet. In this regard Councillor A. A. Sardar enquired as to progress on the agreed Multi-Faith Burial Subsidy Scheme and the Acting Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that preparatory work was underway and the scheme would be launched shortly.

The Committee endorsed the amendments suggested. Accordingly the Chair **MOVED** and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the following pre-decision questions be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration:

Agenda Item 6.1 Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2008/09 (CAB 012/089)

1. Members of the Health Scrutiny Panel have raised issues around 'approved fast food outlets and general community information on 'cooking practices' in the borough. Will the Cabinet consider instigating a poster campaign in partnership with the PCT about which cooking oil is the healthiest to use and which is not?
2. Can the Cabinet review staffing numbers as it seems that it is top heavy where it needs to be the other way round as most of the visits and inspection are done by the EHO and SEHO?
3. How many employees are directly employed in the food safety department? Can the Cabinet assure us that the staffing level is adequate, as 2339 food premises already exist with a potential increase for the Olympics in 2012? Therefore, should the department increase its number rapidly or look to train well in advance to take on the pressure?

Agenda Item 7.1 Recommissioning LinkAge Plus (CAB 013/089)

1. What is the efficiency saving expected on the new plan? (one organisation to win contract and co-ordinate the others, and the other four lose their co-ordinators) With this in mind have the five host organisations been consulted to ensure that the change and the loss of the other four organisers will not skew focus onto the area covered by the organisation that wins the contract, It is critical that the whole borough benefits equally.
2. At the last Cabinet we saw the fast track procurement process on the Chillers for IT suite in Anchorage House, this Cabinet the procurement process is being limited to only five "Host Organisations". Can the Cabinet reassure us that this is not becoming a common practice of fast tracking procurement process?
3. Can the Cabinet inform us what monitoring systems are in place to ensure we get the best value from this contract?

Agenda Item 8.1 London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, Draft Bromley-by-Bow Land Use Design Brief (CAB 014/089)

1. The area closest to the Bow roundabout still seems to be lacking in open space under the new plan. In fact the area where the Supermarket, hotel etc is planned seems to have all the open space and lower density housing. We will not address the need of the community nearest the flyover, which is now, and will be, the part most in need of green space to mitigate the road proximity. Can the Cabinet outline how they will address this issue?
2. The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has not been fully undertaken and fails to address the needs of our community within the six equalities strands. Can the Cabinet assure us that a comprehensive EQIA is undertaken which addresses all the community needs?
3. The report states that there will be a minimum of 35% affordable housing; this is a ratio so far the Council has struggled to deliver. Can the Cabinet guarantee that this will be delivered and not reduced in future date?
4. The table on page 137 indicate that there will be 25% of larger units, but the break down highlights less of the four and five bedrooms which we needs the most, can the Cabinet revert and increase the numbers of the four and five bedroom homes rather than the one and two bedrooms properties? Will they consider including some six bedroom properties?

Agenda Item 12.1 Housing Revenue Account Provisional Outturn Report
2007/08 (CAB 016/089)

1. Can the Cabinet inform us why there was an under spend of £4m and why was this amount not spent to bring some of the homes to decent standard?
2. Can the cabinet inform us why it is taking so long to create the ALMO and why it has missed the initial deadline with an expenditure of £300,000? Also it informs us that there will be some further stock transfers. Can the Cabinet inform us which estates the Council is intending to transfer and the approximate timeline?
3. Can the Cabinet inform us who has commissioned or approved RSLs to take surveys and hold public meetings regarding the future of housing in Ocean Estate?
4. Can the Cabinet inform us how Leaseholders have been consulted and how the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review on Leaseholders been implemented and considered as part of this report.

11. ANY OTHER SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was no exempt/confidential business to be considered at the meeting.

13. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

14. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF SECTION TWO (RESTRICTED) CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

15. ANY OTHER SECTION TWO (RESTRICTED) BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.