

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 7 March 2022 at 6.30 p.m., Room C1, 1st Floor, Town Hall,
Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London, E14 2BG

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

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3 .1 7th February 2022

All Wards

3 - 12

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th February 2022.

3 .3 21st February 2022.

All Wards

13 - 20

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21st February 2022.

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.31 P.M. ON MONDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2022

**ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Mohammed Pappu (Chair)

Councillor Bex White (Vice-Chair)	– Scrutiny Lead for Children and Education
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Denise Jones	
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	– Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Leema Qureshi	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance
Councillor Andrew Wood	

Co-opted Members Present:

Halima Islam – Co-Optee

Other Councillors Present:

Mayor John Biggs
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Eve McQuillan

Officers Present:

Marcus Barnett	– Detective Chief Superintendent - MPS Central East Borough Command Unit
Ann Corbett	– (Director, Community Safety)
Keith Daley	– Interim Head Substance Misuse
Charles Griggs	– Head of Community Safety
Keith Stanger	– (Head of Safer Neighbourhood Operations)
Nisar Visram	– (Director of Finance, Procurement & Audit)
Allister Bannin	– (Head of Strategic and Corporate Finance)
Afazul Hoque	– (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
David Knight	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)
Filuck Miah	– (Strategy and Policy Officer,

Corporate Strategy and Policy
Team)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

- I. Councillor Marc Francis due to his wife Councillor Rachel Blake being the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing.

2. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil Items

3. CHAIRS UPDATE

Noted.

4. ACTION LOG

Noted.

5. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13/12/2021

The Committee confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13/12/2021.

5.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24/01/2022

The Committee confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24/01/2022.

6. COMMUNITY SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

6.1 Community Safety Spotlight with Cabinet Member and Borough Commander

The Committee received and commented on a presentation on the progress of community safety priorities including tackling serious youth violence.

The Committee:

- ❖ **Agreed** that women felt most unsafe when alone and no one should fear being alone or accepting this situation as normal.
- ❖ **Agreed** on the importance to actively promote women's night safety and help to make more women and girls to feel confident around Tower Hamlets after dark. Therefore, women and girls need to know what to

do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling; encouraging reporting by victims and bystanders; offering training to ensure that all who report are believed; and designing public spaces and workplaces to make them feel safer at night as well as shining a light on those areas where there is still a need to do more work.

- ❖ **Agreed** that recent events has highlighted these concerns and that the fear of women and girls is not irrational. It comes from a deep acknowledgment that women in the community do not feel safe and addressing the misogyny is necessary.
- ❖ **Acknowledged** the grave levels of public concern following a number of deeply troubling incidents and allegations. It was felt that the bond of trust between residents and the Metropolitan MPS Service (MPS) locally as well as corporately has been broken.
- ❖ **Stated** that they were committed to collaborating with Detective Chief Superintendent Marcus Barnett and his Team to rebuild the trust and confidence of Borough's communities in the Metropolitan MPS Service.
- ❖ **Recognised** that the Borough has huge numbers of wonderfully professional officers and staff but recognised the actions of some are of serious concern and fall far below the high standards of the Metropolitan MPS Service.
- ❖ As **mentioned** above wished with work with the Detective Chief Superintendent Barnett and his Team to rebuild trust, raise standards, and ensure the Boroughs MPS Officers work in a positive, supportive, and healthy culture that sets an example for others to follow.
- ❖ **Noted** that **(i)** many residents particularly in Limehouse have told the MPS that antisocial behaviour linked to the use of nitrous oxide, otherwise known as laughing gas, is a significant concern, **(ii)** the (MPS) and its partner agencies have received complaints that it can be intimidating seeing groups of people taking it; and **(iii)** nitrous oxide causes a noise nuisance and the small metal canisters that hold it are often left on the floor as litter, which creates a mess on the Boroughs streets.
- ❖ **Noted** that women are constantly worried about their safety when walking at night, walking to their car at night, using an elevator or stairwell in public spaces, taking public transportation, or traveling.
- ❖ **Agreed** that the (MPS) locally as well as corporately should **(i)** ensure that the way they deal with violence against women and girls needs to be effective and as assertive as it can be and **(ii)** make sure that allegations are being thoroughly investigated.
- ❖ Was please to **noted** that **(i)** the locally as well as corporately clearly understood what has happened and what action needs to be taken, and **(ii)** has the absolute determination to do what is necessary to start rebuilding the trust that has been lost.
- ❖ **Welcomed** the knowledge that the (MPS) locally as well as corporately recognises that it has to be listening to the communities in Tower Hamlets that they seek to serve, to give residents the confidence that if they report an incident something will happen, and they will be taken seriously.
- ❖ **Noted** that the (MPS) locally as well as corporately are running a significant campaign on inclusion, diversity, equality throughout the

organization to talk about and to increase levels of standards. Understanding what officers and staff need to know in terms of the (MPS) values, the code of ethics, what is expected of officers on duty and off duty as this is a job like no other, officers have to work to a higher standard which is the public expects.

- ❖ **Welcomed** the ongoing dialogue within the (MPS) locally as well as corporately with Female, Black Asian Minority Ethnic; and Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning) LGBTQQ+ officers looking at everything from policy process, fair working practices, and making sure that the MPS is a safe place to work and to have a zero tolerance to inappropriate behaviour, criminal acts, and ensuring that those people leave the organization (**e.g.**, address misogyny, sexism, and racism within the MPS).
- ❖ **Agreed** that crime and antisocial behaviour are a top concern for residents and wanted to see the Council to work ever more closely with the MPS to increase high-visibility patrols and target criminals, but also to make sure people can access support when they need it.
- ❖ **Noted** the MPS are working very closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.
- ❖ **Accepted** that there are many resolute people in the MPS and CPS who were unwavering in their efforts to do the right thing for victims of crime often in difficult and challenging circumstances.
- ❖ **Hoped** that this commitment and resolve to make improvements are to be commended and are worthy of note. However, Members felt that there needs to be a profound, and fundamental shift in how cases are investigated and prosecuted, as currently this is having a significant impact on victims of crime.
- ❖ **Noted** that whilst within the current judicial legal framework it can take several months to investigate a really serious crime and gather the required forensic evidence. There is work ongoing to improve the process from all agencies working within the judicial process.
- ❖ **Noted** that within Tower Hamlets there are some of the best detection rates across London around drugs, domestic abuse, hate crime, rape; sexual, knife crime and people who have been stabbed but not murdered.
- ❖ **Agreed** the MPS locally as well as corporately have got work to rebuild trust and confidence as policing by consent has continuing relevance to present day policing because it marks out an important way in which officers can fulfil their core mission.
- ❖ **Agreed** that by thinking broadly in terms of 'institutional trust,' it is possible to demonstrate that, by improving public perceptions it will enhance the legitimacy of the MPS which will help in its efforts to reduce crime.
- ❖ **Agreed** that local policing needs to remain at the heart of the work that the MPS does locally as well as corporately and the dedicated Ward Officers are known to and part of the communities they serve and strong links with the communities are vital to help the MPS gather intelligence, detect crime, and retain the confidence of Londoners. In

addition, high visibility patrols in the Borough various wards provide reassurance in those particular locations.

- ❖ **Noted** with concern that **(i)** women do not feel confident in coming forward to statutory agencies to report offences, **(ii)** the sanction detection rate in the past four years for domestic abuse and sexual offences has been at an all-time low, **(iii)** actually going through the court process is really, really difficult for victims of sexual abuse and domestic abuse as they have got to relive what has happened to them.
- ❖ **Agreed** that having independent domestic abuse support workers is really key, as well as independent sexual violence advisors to support victims through the court process.
- ❖ **Agreed** that where women do feel unsafe in the Borough then resources should be deployed there.
- ❖ **Welcomed** the Councils close collaboration with dedicated Ward Officers to address the concerns of women who feel unsafe in particular wards.
- ❖ **Agreed** that developing male allyship is really important to create a culture of mutual respect and consideration has never been of more importance to ask men to change their behaviour rather than asking women to change theirs.
- ❖ **Agreed** that it is of important for the Police and the partners across both children and health services to tackle the crimes that cause most harm to children and young people **e.g.**, knife crime, gang-related crime, sexual exploitation, and serious youth violence. The approach to such crimes to focus on preventing crime, intervening with those already involved in criminal activity, and taking tough enforcement action against those who persist in breaking the law.
- ❖ **Noted** that the MPS Cadets have assisted with test purchasing visits in a joint operation with Tower Hamlets Council where they have visited various premises who are selling cigarettes and alcohol and those premises who failed to challenge the underage purchaser would face proceedings because they also failed a test purchase. The use of the MPS Cadets is very much dependent on their availability and subject to intelligence and activity that there are irresponsible licensees or license holders.
- ❖ **Noted** that County Lines is a drug supply business model, in relation to Class A, that in turn stimulates the activity within the middle market drugs supply linked to organised crime. The scale of the current complex threat posed by county lines in relation to the exploitation of children and other vulnerable persons to facilitate drug dealing is extensive and affects every police service area.
- ❖ **Noted** the Borough Command recently had a meeting with Kit Moorhouse (Minister of State for Crime and Policing) when he came to the Bethnal Green where officers presented to him the work that they are doing centrally around County Lines, and as part of a bid for more resource to dismantle some of those County Lines and more, importantly stop the harm to those young people who participate in this activity.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked all those attendees for their contributions to the discussions which had provided a good sense on the progress in regard to community safety priorities within the Borough.

7. SPOTLIGHT SESSION

7.1 Mayors Spotlight

The Chair introduced the main substantive item this evening and he thanked the Executive Mayor John Biggs and the Chief Executive Will Tuckley for, attending this evening's meeting and the key themes arising from the questioning on the presentation may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ **Noted** in regard to Covid that vaccines still remain the first line of defence to live with and manage the virus. Staff therefore are encouraged if they have not already, get their first, second or booster vaccine to protect themselves and others.
- ❖ Was **advised** that from the first week of February, all Council staff were advised that they are expected to be in at least one day a week for the first three weeks of February, and then from at least from February 21st at least two days a week.
- ❖ **Noted** that it is intended to keep in place socially distanced lifts, with capacity now at four people at a time. Whilst the cleaning and sanitising stations continue to be available and enhanced cleaning regimes remain in place.
- ❖ Was **informed** that staff will still be encouraged to conduct regular lateral flow tests (access the lateral flow testing sites at Mulberry Place and the Waste Services Depot). If staff should evaluate positive or are experiencing any symptoms of Covid-19, they must inform their line-manager that they can work from home if in line with service needs.
- ❖ **Noted** that the health and safety of all staff is the Council's top priority and to support the return of staff to keeping certain measures in place, including risk assessments, enhanced cleaning regimes, cleaning and sanitising stations, and socially distanced desks, lifts, and meeting rooms. In addition to that the Council are also requesting that staff should wear face coverings when entering, walking around buildings, in lifts and when meeting residents/customers.
- ❖ **Noted** subject to the relevant bylaw if you rent a garage from your Housing Provider as well as being used for the storage of taxed and roadworthy private motor vehicles, garages can also be used to store other vehicles including small commercial vehicles, bicycles tools and garden equipment.
- ❖ Was **informed** that as the first stage of Leisure Estate Investment Plan, the Council intended to replace the existing St George's Leisure Centre with a new 'wet/dry' leisure centre on the current site, subject to approval of the capital budget by Cabinet
- ❖ **Noted** that it is estimated this will cost £35m, while the initial allocation in the Council's 2022-23 Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial

Strategy 2022-25 report, considered separately at Cabinet or if desired through further scrutiny is for £25.163m, given the timescales for delivering the project. The existing St George's building is considered beyond its economic and design life, in a poor condition and with a limited range of facilities to meet the needs of residents in this vicinity, and in the wider context of the whole estate.

- ❖ **Noted** if no action were taken then St George's would remain closed and no alternative proposals in place for re-providing its capacity at John Orwell or any other site. The rest of the estate would not be improved in the short to medium term, so that only four pools would be available when York Hall's pool reopens. Residents in the Shadwell and Wapping area would need to continue to travel to Poplar Baths, Mile End or York Hall to swim in a Council-owned leisure centre. Although interim measures are in place to enable schools to meet the KS2 curriculum swimming requirement, it would obviously be more convenient to have local pool access.
- ❖ **Noted** that regard to street services whilst Public Realm is working hard to ensure that there are minimal disruptions to the service recruitment and retention within the service is still sensitive to Covid-19 and other related issues (**e.g.**, shortages in the labour market). There is a specific ongoing risk of HGV driver shortage (linked to national shortages). In addition, shortages in drivers means that you lose that knowledge of the various routes. It has proved to be a considerable difficulty is in relation to drivers, LBTH currently have 10 agency drivers and then 37 other operatives to assist with the with the process. However, it remains an ongoing challenge to ensure that there are enough drivers/operatives
- ❖ **Noted** that there is a need for additional supervisory staff to deliver the service as there are currently insufficient number of supervisor, prolonged sickness of management staff.
- ❖ **Noted** the issues relating to Brexit **e.g.**, supply change issues- resulting in shortage of bins and vehicle parts.
- ❖ **Considered** the advantages and disadvantages to using underground waste storage systems. One of the main advantages of in effect hiding the waste underground is that reduces any potential disturbances to residents by reducing the potential noise impact from residents rolling bins back and forth, and through a reduction in odour as the waste is enclosed underground. Although the design of Underground Refuse Systems (URS) means that the refuse vehicles they do not have the capacity to collect wheeled bins or require the procurement of a specialist vehicle specifically designed for the purpose.
- ❖ **Noted** that the Council currently has a number of URS Vehicles these vehicles have cranes on top of them to lift up the URS units. These cranes are very specialists with many moving parts, and they have to lift 30 bins every single day per vehicle which means that there is bound to be a lot of stress on each crane. Therefore, the Service has increased the frequency from a three month to a monthly regime of maintenance to ensure that that they can have these vehicles deployed on a day-to-day basis.

- ❖ **Noted** in regard to the patterns of waste across the Borough the Council are remapping the whole of Tower Hamlets both in terms of the routes, volumes, and tonnage of waste.
- ❖ **Commented** that the Young People Service (YPS) was not being as effective as it could be and therefore should be subject of further scrutiny **e.g.**, expand the offer to young people; the commissioning of services for the for the detached youth; develop the range of activities available at youth hubs in Tower Hamlets; improving the offer for the LGBTQI and the disability provision.
- ❖ **Noted** that Tower Hamlets is working closely with a number of employers within a range of sectors including construction, creative arts, digital media, hospitality and catering and fitness to try and prevent young people in a difficult job market from becoming reliant on Universal Credit over the long term. This scheme called Kickstart aims to do this by creating new six-month job placements for those aged between 16-24 who currently receive Universal Credit and are at risk of long-term unemployment and LBTH is ahead of most local authorities. However, the Council needs to provide additional catch-up support for young people who might have got behind with their skills and employability.
- ❖ **Agreed** that there should be detailed consideration on unemployed young people locally to establish the unemployment picture across the Borough historically, before analysing the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on youth unemployment in the Borough.
- ❖ **Acknowledged** that unemployment is a difficult experience, financially and emotionally, regardless of a person's age. However, it is particularly damaging for young people especially their mental and physical health can be negatively affected, both now and in the future as unemployment increases susceptibility to illness, mental stress, and loss of self-esteem leading to depression. Therefore, the (YPS) needs to provide not only nourishing youth activities for people who are motivated and really want to move forward but also services which supports people who might be at risk of disengagement and might have safeguarding concerns around them.
- ❖ **Agreed** that those young people who **(i)** have not prospered in their education; **(ii)** have made difficult choices; **(iii)** have had their education dislocated for personal reasons need support.
- ❖ **Agreed** that a good YPS is one that works to address unemployment and help young people to reach their full potential.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked all those attendees for their contributions to the discussions which had provided a good sense on the progress in regard to strategic performance and delivery.

8. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Committee received and noted the updates that had been received from Scrutiny Leads in regard to their portfolio's.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Following comments by the Committee the Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions (PDSQ) Members **agreed** the particular questions/recommendations that they wanted to raise with Cabinet on the 9th of February 2022 (**See attached appendix**).

10. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

Nil items

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As the agenda circulated contained no exempt/ confidential reports and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

12. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.17 p.m.

**Chair, Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

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LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.31 P.M. ON MONDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2022

**ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Mohammed Pappu (Chair)
Councillor Bex White (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Faroque Ahmed – Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan – Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Leema Qureshi – Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Halima Islam – Co-Optee

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Asma Begum
Councillor Rachel Blake
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Candida Ronald

Apologies:

Councillor Ehtasham Haque – Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration

Officers Present:

Musrat Zaman – (Director of HR, OD & Business Support Services)
Catherine Cooke – (Contract Development Manager)
Dan Jones – (Director, Public Realm)
Joseph Lacey-Holland – (Senior Strategy Policy & Performance Officer)
Michael McHugh – (Associate Director of Public Health)
Judith St John – (Director, Commissioning and Culture, Children's Services)
Richard Williams – Business Manager Operational PR
Denise Radley – (Corporate Director, Health, Adults &

Community)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

The following Member for transparency declared a potential interest in relation to:

1. **Item 9 Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions** Councillor Marc Francis due to his wife Councillor Rachel Blake being the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health, and Wellbeing.

2. ACTION LOG

The Committee **noted** that it had received the response regarding the Liveable Streets recommendations as detailed in the Action Log.

In addition, it was noted that there were the following action log items:

- ❖ A breakdown of the recent Autumn Budget and Spending Review announcement and the projected implications for Tower Hamlets.
- ❖ A report on the review of Leisure Centres that was to be provided to the Committee; and
- ❖ A written note to be provided with an explanation as to why the decision to agree the extension of AEG was not considered to be a key decision.

3. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

4. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

The Committee **noted** Cabinet forward plan as of 16th November 2021 and that for the most up to date version, Members were recommended to check the Cabinet web pages on the [council's website](#).

5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil Items.

6. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

6.1 BAME Commission Action Plan

The Committee reviewed and noted the progress of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission action plan, and considered the impact of the actions in addressing race inequality within the Council's workforce. The main points raised because of questioning summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH has been developing an ambitious programme of activities which will have a real impact on outcomes for residents and provided a step change for addressing longer term challenges and highlighted by the Commission and agreed by Cabinet in October 2021 with a committed to fund over £1.5 million to deliver on the actions that represented one of the biggest investments and intervention by any local authority to address race inequality.
- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH is the first borough in London to commit to such a comprehensive programme and the longer-term aspiration is that the changes will be mainstreamed into the core roles within those services for BAME groups (including asylum seekers, refugees and those granted Indefinite Leave to Remain) living and/or working in the Borough. However, before any changes are made the individual service will need to be looked at to see how effectively it is working based on the available data,
- ❖ **Welcomed** the work being done to (i) promote, retain and progress BAME women, who are under-represented in leadership roles, (ii) build a more diverse and inclusive workforce in which contributions from all staff members are valued (**e.g.**, developing a training and support).
- ❖ **Noted** that there are other organisations that are also with the support of the Council are looking at developing more female empowering projects as well as leadership projects as well.
- ❖ **Noted** that savings will be reprofiled and other cuts that are going to full Council that may need to be reviewed to consider whether or not it is going to affect the workforce.
- ❖ **Commented** that with regard to the work force profile over the last couple of years staff (i) earning over 60K who are BAME, is down to few percentage points, (ii) earning over 60K who are female, is down four percentage points and (iii) earning over 60K who are living with a disability is down to a few percentage points.
- ❖ **Noted** LBTH are going to undertake a detailed analysis of the pay gap to understand exactly what is going on. However, since 2019 there have been big changes in the workforce **e.g.**, LBTH has lost 300 staff from 2019 to 2021 and insourcing of Street Services means that it is not yet clear. Once that has been clarified LBTH would be able to go back and benchmark with other organisations in terms of how they have set that figure.
- ❖ **Noted** that when undertaking any reorganization d restructures an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) provides a way of systematically taking equal opportunities into consideration when LBTH undertakes any significant changes to policy or services that could have disproportionate impact on particular groups.
- ❖ **Agreed** that it is important to ensure BAME staff are involved and engaged in the design and delivery of any service.
- ❖ **Agreed** that investing in diversity including ethnic diversity will improve the quality of their customer service, build long term relationships with customers, and improve ethnic staff performance.

- ❖ **Agreed** that diversity must remain a core priority for senior leaders and that they should have responsibility for delivering measurable diversity outcomes.
- ❖ **Agreed** that there needs to be a safe space within the Council for staff to ensure that there can be meaningful discussions around race so that that idea of making sure that LBTH staff are at the heart of any decision making.
- ❖ **Noted** that the Council are collaborating with local employers across various sectors together in terms of enabling more local people to get into employment and working with local universities around summer schemes and looking at internship programs.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked everyone for the for the presentation and stated that **(i)** it had been an especially useful discussion that helped Members get a sense of the direction of travel; and **(ii)** he looked forward to keeping a close eye on the on the BAME action plan and to receive a progress at a future meeting.

7. TRACKING RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Review of LBTH response to COVID-19

The Committee noted the Executive's updated action plan response to the recommendations arising from OSC's review of the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to September 2020. It was noted that Covid-19 and its variants will continue to circulate it that it is estimated that it will take 5 year to get to a predictable endemic state. Repeated vaccination may be required to maintain immunity and future epidemics are possible that will overwhelm health and care services. . The main points raised because of questioning summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ **Agreed** that LBTH needs to create conditions in which can live, work and study as safely as possible while the virus circulate
- ❖ **Agreed** that the response will need to focus on the most vulnerable and the direct/indirect disproportionate impacts on individuals, groups, and communities with LBTH.
- ❖ **Noted** that whilst there is no longer a legal requirement for people with coronavirus (Covid-19) infection to self-isolate it is their personal responsibility not to pass on any infection.
- ❖ **Agreed** that there is no doubt that coronavirus has had a negative impact on staff with anxiety about the pandemic, forced lockdowns and uncertainty about when this will end.
- ❖ **Noted** that young adults have been especially badly hit during the pandemic with curtailed education, diminished job prospects and reduced social contact with peers.
- ❖ **Noted** that the covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated access problems in general practice and patients have reported finding it difficult to book appointments and access treatment.
- ❖ **Agreed** that whilst LBTH does not have a direct influence over general practitioners there has been discussion at the Boroughs Health and

Well-Board about encouraging Tower Hamlets GP Care group to offer patients a choice of the type of appointment they would prefer whether it be video, face-to-face, or a home visit. As some patients have struggled to get appointments for regular health check-ups, treatments, and drug reviews, meaning that some were unable to manage their condition.

- ❖ **Hoped** that as LBTH enters a quiescent phase of COVID then the hope is that there will be a return more to normal service across the board.
- ❖ **Agreed** that the clearest impact of Covid-19 is in the infection and mortality rate in Tower Hamlets. However, there are significant indirect physical health impacts too. The interaction Tower Hamlets residents have with the NHS for non-Covid-19 related issues changed or reduced in most areas when the pandemic started. Due to this and a fear of Covid-19, some are not getting the care or treatment they need. Meanwhile, the wider determinants of health (e.g., employment levels) are changing. There is a real risk that health inequalities in the Borough will increase and that many will be living in poorer health. This is likely to be a national trend, but Tower Hamlets may be hit harder given the existing health inequalities. However, going forward there is also an opportunity to capitalise on people's interest in staying healthy to encourage things like smoking cessation and active travel. The NHS is also likely to accelerate system changes and retain aspects of their pandemic response that worked well, such as 111 use and digital consultations.
- ❖ **Agreed** that there are lots of business continuity lessons to be learned from the pandemic across the organization and the partner agencies that need to be embedded in local policies as has been the case with the flu pandemic plan.
- ❖ **Noted** the provision of universal free tests in England is soon ending, as the pandemic reaches endemic levels. Whilst from April 1, 2022, those not classed as vulnerable will have to pay for a lateral flow test as free universal symptomatic and asymptomatic testing will end for the general public in England.
- **Expressed** concern that self-isolation support payments of £500 for those on low incomes have stopped and puts LBTH in a position of having to make some pretty quick decisions. Therefore, the Committee indicated that it wished to consider how LBTH was going to address this as part of the living with Covid plan.
- **Noted** that the self-isolation support payments are interlocking system, so not only is the self-isolation payments paid or funded by government grant, but that access to it you need a PCR positive test code. Therefore, with the removal of PCR test there is no mechanism that LBTH would be able to utilize to determine whether or not somebody actually has the virus or not even if funding were to be found to help those on low incomes .
- ❖ **Noted** that to cover isolation payments is a challenge that LBTH face because as soon as you start changing and tinkering with one part of the system, it has knock on effects in other parts of the system and that the challenge that LBTH face which is responding to that and trying to

chart a way forward so that LBTH can support residents to be as safe as possible.

- ❖ **Agreed** there at some point Covid must be treated not as an emergency pandemic but a longer-term fact of life, which is mitigated in ways that allows everyday life to carry on.
- ❖ **Noted** that the virus is to be seen as “endemic,” but with the possibility of yet more variants, that potentially produce a different kind of strain on the service although the experience with Omicron so far has not translated into serious illness to anywhere near to the same extent as previous variants of Covid.
- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH came into the pandemic with high but improving levels of deprivation and employment. However, since the first lockdown, there has been an increase in financial hardship from a reduction in income. One of the clearest signs of changing circumstances has been the surge in food bank use and demand for emergency food packages.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked everyone for the for the presentation and stated that the provided overview had given the Committee some level of assurance and also raised some questions as well and the Committee will be keeping a close eye on this issue and wished to receive further updates.

7.2 Recycling Behaviour Change

Members were reminded that Overview and Scrutiny held a challenge session on Wednesday 23rd September 2020 on how the Council applies evidence and best practice to influence resident behaviour change to boost recycling rates in the Borough.

The Committee

- ❖ **Agreed** that recycling is vital to a circular economy as it feeds materials such as plastics, paper, metal, and glass back into manufacturing and reduces the need for virgin materials, saving both money and carbon in the process.
- ❖ **Agreed** that LBTH needs to collaborate closely with residents to drive up recycling, creating actionable insights for the Council, housing providers and residents to help them recycle more to drive awareness and behaviour change across the Borough.
- ❖ **Noted** that food waste accounts for about half the weight of household rubbish in Tower Hamlets. When food waste is collected separately it can be turned in to something useful. The food waste collected from households in Tower Hamlets is taken to a special processing plant where it is turned in to compost and used by farmers as a fertiliser.
- ❖ **Agreed** it is important for residents to understand what materials can and cannot be recycled can sometimes be confusing so by providing people with clear and concise information will help solve this issue. The first place to start should be making sure all collection points have

clearly labelled which materials should be placed in each appropriate bin.

- ❖ **Noted** that in certain parts of the Borough where we actually having to do extra collection or recycling and the Service collaborates very closely with landlords.
- ❖ **Agreed** that it was important to encourage people to collapse cardboard boxes to prevent recycling containers becoming overfilled. Which is why the Council wants to do some really targeted communication work with residents, landlords, managing agents in order to make sure if there is anything we can do to support them to recycle.
- ❖ **Noted** that those residents with a purple wheelie bin or a large communal recycling bin, can empty recycling into the bin loose or use any clear sack. If residents do not have access to a purple bin, they can collect recycling sacks from Idea Stores and libraries.
- ❖ **Noted** that clear sacks and food waste liners can be purchased from most supermarkets.
- ❖ **Noted** that Tower Hamlets has a remarkably diverse and changing population and faces considerable challenges improve recycling. 86% of the Boroughs population live in high rise properties or gated communities with limited storage space and properties with gardens (and therefore garden waste) are rare. Therefore, given that the biggest challenge is around flats that this where the biggest benefit is to be had from. To encourage participation and increase the recycling figures the basics need to be right and need to work alongside innovative ways of improving the take up of recycling across geographical areas and property types across the diverse population.
- ❖ **Agreed** that much greater consideration also needs to be given to incentivising recycling and making sure that recycling becomes the norm in all households across the borough.
- ❖ **Noted** that as part of the commitment to reduce single-use plastic, improve the quality of recycling and save money, the Council are proposing to roll out of reusable recycling bags for the reusable bags . These bags will reduce the amount of single use plastic and reduce the impact on the environment.
- ❖ **Noted** that the recycling market prefers to receive the material loose, so removing plastic bags should reduce processing cost. In addition, reusable bags can be used over and over again so they will cost less to supply than the single use plastic bags in the longer term.

In conclusion, the Committee having **(i)** reviewed and noted the progress of the service action plan; **(ii)** considered areas of concern; and **(iii)** resident's behaviour change on recycling the Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the discussion which had been very useful the level of recycling has been a key issue for the Council for some time now, and the compounded further by the pandemic; vehicle breakdowns; the transition of bringing in the service back in House and improving the service especially in regard to recycling.

8. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Committee received and noted the updates submitted and the Leads were requested to continue to provide these on a monthly basis.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Following comments by the Committee the Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions (PDSQ) Members **agreed** the particular questions/recommendations that they wanted to raise with Cabinet on the 15th of December 2021 (**See attached appendix**).

10. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

The Committee **noted** that:

- ❖ With no other business to discuss, the Chair called the meeting to a close; and
- ❖ The next meeting will be on Monday 7th March 2022.

Finally, the Chair thanked scrutiny members, for their attendance and participation tonight.

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As the agenda circulated contained no exempt/confidential reports and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

12. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 8.33 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Overview & Scrutiny Committee