

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.33 P.M. ON MONDAY, 22 JUNE 2020

ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)

Members Present:

Councillor James King (Chair)	
Councillor Sufia Alam (Vice-Chair)	
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	– Scrutiny Lead for Health & Adults
Councillor Dipa Das	– Scrutiny Lead for Housing & Regeneration
Councillor Marc Francis	–
Councillor Tarik Khan	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance
Councillor Bex White	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment
Councillor Andrew Wood	–
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Co-opted Members Present:

Halima Islam	– Co-Optee
James Wilson	– Co-Optee

Other Councillors Present:

Officers Present:

Jackie Applebee	– GP Representative, Local Medical Committee
Pam Bhamra	– Chair of Tower Hamlets Community Housing
Doctor Naureen Bhatti	– Head of School of General Practice for North Central & East London
Zoe Folley	– (Committee Officer, Governance)
Sister Christine Frost	–

Sharon Godman	– (Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance)
Afazul Hoque	– (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Muna Ismail	– (MIND Tower Hamlets)
Daniel Kerr	– (Strategy and Policy Manager)
David Knight	– (Senior Democratic Services Officer)
Ian Parkes	– Chair of ELBA
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1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair:

- Welcomed everybody to the meeting and informed those in attendance that this meeting is being recorded and will be available to view via the Council's website by tomorrow morning;
- It is important that these formal scrutiny meetings resume as the Council must continue to demonstrate transparency and openness in its decision-making, and include scrutiny as part and parcel of the Council's operations for and on behalf of the residents of Tower Hamlets;
- Following Government advice to avoid all but essential travel and to practice social distancing, this will be a virtual meeting. If during the meeting a technical error occurs with the transmission which cannot be resolved within a reasonable period of time, then the meeting will be closed and the remaining business will be deferred to a subsequent meeting of the Committee on a date to be determined, and notified by way of the publication of the agenda on the Council's web site;
- Congratulated Councillor Eve McQuillan appointment as the Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion;
- Congratulated Councillor Sufia Alam who would be shortly taking up an appointment as the Mayoral Advisor for Community and Voluntary Sector, and to support young people post Covid-19. The Committee noted that as Councillor Alam was yet to take up her appointment she could still participate in tonight's meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

Nil items

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

3.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th February 2020

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the last formal meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th February 2020 be agreed subject to: (i) the following amendment; and (ii) a review of the public webcast of the meeting.

RESOLVED that on the basis of the information and advice received the change to a key decision was **not** warranted.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

5. COVID-19 COMMUNITY INSIGHT

The Committee continued its review of the Borough's response to COVID-19 with the aim of supporting Tower Hamlets efforts by:

1. Offering recommendations for areas to be improved.
2. Learning about the work being undertaken to respond to the pandemic; and
3. Reflecting upon local feedback received regarding the plans that have been put in place to support the Borough's residents.

The outcome of this review being to capture the response in Tower Hamlets (not just the Council's) and to identify learning and appropriate actions to be taken forward should there be subsequent waves of the pandemic.

The report is intended to cover three key areas:

- a. An assessment of how the Council has handled the response.
- b. An assessment of recovery phase; and
- c. What key challenges remain and how the Council can improve its future Pandemic Plan.

In addition, it will capture the work across all the scrutiny committees and the aim is to agree the report at September's OSC meeting.

The Committee then heard from the following members from the community and in partner organisations to help provide an insight and to help the Committee get a better understanding of the impact of the Council's response to COVID-19 on the community. The discussions on these presentations may be summarised as follows:

Pam Bhamra, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum and Director of Operations at Tower Hamlets Community Housing.

The Committee noted that Ms. Bhamra welcomed the partnership approach which has been delivered and valued involvement in the Pandemic Committee and Community Mobilisation Silver Group. She highlighted the importance of replacing and reinventing community centres with online activities and identified overcrowding in households as a key issue which has had a knock-on effect on people not isolating effectively, allowed the virus to spread more easily, and put a strain on home schooling. She also identified isolation and loneliness as key issues.

The Committee:

1. Indicated that it would wish to see how the Council and housing partners intended to provide long term support for homeless/rough sleepers residents who have been supported into hostels and temporary accommodation.
2. Wanted the Council to review the quality of its short-term accommodation, especially in instances where families with children have been placed in accommodation with shared facilities and amenities; and
3. Noted that the Housing and Regeneration Sub-Committee would be exploring some of these issues further at their meeting on the 13 July 2020.

Ian Parkes, Chief Executive of East London Business Alliance (ELBA)

Mr Parkes provided his feedback on the impact on businesses and the economy. He praised the strong partnership approach and the robust leadership role that the Council has taken. The Committee was pleased to note that ELBA have had no notifications of business closures or insolvency. However, it was noted that the key challenges for businesses are impending as most small businesses will not be able to keep running beyond 3 months if lockdown does not end reasonably quickly. Also, while there has been relatively little feedback from firms in high distress, this it was noted may change in the months ahead as businesses reopen and begin to incur costs whilst their revenues are slower to recover.

The Committee questioned the fairness of the discretionary grant for market traders and indicated that it would like the Council to review this and provide further information on how this grant has been apportioned. Mr Parkes also identified a number of other issues which will be explored further in (a) the Sub Committee meetings; and (b) the report including support for VCS organisations, employment support for education leavers in 2021 and support for school and college students who have lost out on significant time in their education.

Dr Jackie Applebee and Dr Naureen Bhatti, Chair and Vice Chair of Tower Hamlets LMC

The Committee received a summary of the key health challenges that Tower hamlets is facing. With the high levels of deprivation and residents of BAME origin, Bangladeshi residents, Tower Hamlets it was noted has particularly difficult challenges in protecting its population from COVID 19. It is therefore imperative in the fight to drive to bring down the infection and hence death rate that there is the introduction of a (i) robust; (ii) locally organised, community test, track, isolate and support programme. It was noted that mortality in care homes has been significant, with some care homes in Tower Hamlets having nearly thirty deaths.

The Committee was concerned to note that the lack of community testing and PPE for care home staff and for key workers in general is likely to have led to unnecessary transmission of the virus. The Committee noted with satisfaction

that whilst this has improved as the pandemic has progressed, there is a need to see a sustained focus and improvement in this area. Two other key challenges the Committee noted were the assessment and treatment of other conditions being put on hold, and the worsening of pre-existing mental health issues or suffering mental illness for the first time due to anxieties regarding COVID 19. It was noted that the Health Sub-Committee would be exploring these plans in this area in further detail at their meeting on 20 July 2020.

Sister Christine from Neighbours in Poplar

Sister Christine fed back her experiences and findings. Significantly, she felt that many of the issues which have presented themselves were not a result of COVID-19 but were pre-existing and exposed by the pandemic. The lack of internet access it was noted has made the issue of isolation more acute and the reliance of the Council to communicate via digital methods has excluded many older and younger residents. Similarly, the vast scale of mental health issues has been highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. Moreover, this pandemic has revealed the necessity to support the Boroughs most vulnerable residents with access to hot meals. The Committee understood the Meals on Wheels service was removed and the Committee asks that the Council consider how they can work with community organisations to ensure residents are provided with a hot meal. The Committee therefore wanted to see the Council review its provision in this area, especially as we enter the winter months when a second wave could emerge. The Committee identified that during this pandemic many people who have not historically been involved in community activism have engaged, volunteered, and helped to set up mutual aid groups. The Committee felt that the Council needs to ensure it does all it can to support and sustain the interests and participation of these individuals as we move further into the recovery and many of these people will have to return to work and may not have as much time to offer.

Accordingly, the Chair moved and it was agreed the following key themes from this discussion were as follows:

The Council needs to:

- A. Do more with partners and residents to support those residents without internet access.
- B. Build on supporting rough sleepers we accommodated to ensure they do not end up in streets.
- C. Build on health response to ensure we capture learning for any second wave; and
- D. Consider how the Council can better mobilise in future pandemic/ emergency, ensuring learning from this is utilised and working with VCS organisations and building on the unprecedented community response.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

- Item deferred
8. **FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**
- Noted
9. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**
- As per attached appendices
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 business and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.
12. **EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**
- Nil items
13. **EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**
- Nil items
14. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS**
- Nil items
15. **ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**
- Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.

Chair, Councillor James King
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Overview & Scrutiny Pre-Decision Questions

22/06/2020

Question	Response
Item 6.1 GLL Financial Assistance Report	
1. Why has this report not been published with sufficient notice?	The report has been withdrawn as key information regarding the financial position of GLL has not been received in time for publication.
Item 6.2 Contract Variation for Diesel Surcharge	
2. Regarding Paragraph 6.5 , given that air quality impacts are the main driver for this policy, and given the limitations of S55 of the RTA 1984, has consideration been given to the installation of additional air quality monitoring stations using the projected increase in parking income?	2. Given that 22 % of the borough's nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions are from diesel cars (London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory 2016), measures to reduce diesel cars in the borough would contribute towards meeting our statutory commitment in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan. There are 4 active air quality monitors in the borough, 2 background and 2 roadside. We will be assessing options for additional air quality monitoring stations in the coming months, alongside a review of our spending commitments in light of the new funding pressures emerging as a result of coronavirus.
3. With regard to the report as a	3. It is estimated that there will be a 10% fall in usage by people that drive a diesel vehicle

<p>whole, while the contract variation is expected to be more than covered by increased income, does this take into account a projected fall in diesel parking when the ULEZ is extended or indeed with this project being successful, as presumable success equals reduction in number of polluting vehicles?</p> <p>4. By what factor would diesel vehicles parking in the borough have to fall before the project is a net loss, and when do we project that this will happen? Will we be able to remove this element of the contract if and when it is no longer needed?</p>	<p>over the first year. Clearly, for the scheme to be successful, this will reduce over time.</p> <p>The initial extension of ULEZ will likely include a 'changeover period' for residents, enabling them to continue driving without paying the charge for a short time to enable them opportunity to change to a less polluting alternative. This was the case in the initial zone.</p> <p>The longer-term usage profile is largely unknown at this stage, particularly given the impact of COVID-19 and car owners financial position could limit their ability to change to a less polluting vehicle.</p> <p>4. It is estimated that 60% of vehicles using paid for parking within the borough is a diesel vehicle. This was drawn from car ownership data, comparisons from the surcharge applied to permit parking, and a sample data set provided by RingGo.</p> <p>There is no 'net loss' in this project, investment costs will be covered within the first year of operation, and thereafter the unit pricing will return a positive budget impact regardless of scale.</p> <p>It is anticipated, as the trends and impacts have been reviewed, that the Council will be able to revise the whole charging regime, possibly moving to dynamic tariffs, focussed on demand rather than a fixed price per space.</p>
<p>5. Given that we are further discouraging the use of diesel vehicles, how many new on street electric vehicle chargers are we installing this financial year to help people transition away from diesel?</p>	<p>To date there are 42 points at 21 sites in the borough (22 free-standing, bollard-style fast chargers at 9 sites 20 are lamp column slow chargers.)</p> <p>It is planned to roll out a total of 112 EVCP in 2020 (2 Rapid Chargers, 28 bollard style fast chargers and 82 lamp column style).</p>

<p>6. Diesel Surcharge - it is estimated that this will raise an additional £1.5m per annum. Will this additional income be committed to measures that encourage sustainable transport?</p>	<p>All revenue from parking, after costs, is reinvested into related services. The Council could direct funding to be ringfenced in the annual budget / fees and charges review.</p>
<p>Item 6.3 Small Business Energy (SME) Energy Improvement Grants Programme – Phase 2</p>	
<p>7. Small Business Energy (SME) Efficiency Grant Program. The current scheme appears to allow businesses to replace old boilers with a more efficient one (it states any project that delivers an energy saving will be considered). In the light of the climate emergency and the need to eliminate fossil fuel use as quickly as possible, would it be sensible for the scheme rules to be amended to avoid funding new gas boilers that will last many years and instead only allow replacement with non-fossil fuel based heating?</p>	<p>To meet the aims of the Climate Emergency we will need to see the end of fossil fuels being used for heating. Central Government is doing a lot of work to decarbonise the electricity grid to favour technologies such as heat pumps as this technology is still not mainstream and is more suitable to new build where air tightness and insulation levels can be achieved and whilst we are in this transition phase heat pumps are not as feasible in refurbishment projects for the following reasons;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The costs to install heat pumps is more compared to gas boilers, even with the support of a grant the SME may not be able to afford the installation costs, so not go ahead with the project. • Heat pumps have higher running costs and higher maintenance costs as electricity is more expensive and will result in higher costs to SMEs • Each building will have to have its own unique solution to installing a heat pump whereas installing a boiler is more straightforward. <p>We work with all SME's to ensure the best technology is being installed in terms of carbon savings and future proofing in the first phase of the programme we only awarded grants for replacement boilers that were very old and extremely inefficient.</p> <p>The program also supports electricity generating technologies such as solar panels.</p> <p>It is possible to stop awarding grants for replacement boilers and instead only fund heat pumps and other non-fossil fuel heating solutions, however we will be left with some very carbon intensive buildings.</p>

<p>8. How does the size of this grant programme compare to those on offer in other Inner London boroughs?</p>	<p>Camden – 50% grants up to £10,000.</p> <p>Islington - £1,500 grants to fund measures that have an overall value of less than £5,000 and achieve energy savings of at least 20%. Up to £5,000 for replacing a gas boiler with a heat pump that have an overall value of less than £15,000.</p> <p>Lewisham – grants of up to £15,000 available, but the project must have a wider community benefit and cannot just be used within the SME’s premises.</p> <p>Hammersmith & Fulham – do not offer grants Lambeth – do not offer grants Greenwich – do not offer grants Wandsworth – do not offer grants Hackney – do not offer grants Kensington & Chelsea – do not offer grants Southwark – do not offer grants Westminster – do not offer grants</p>
<p>6.4 Update on the Regional Adoption Agency; Adoption London East (ALE)</p>	
<p>9. Dip in performance has been attributed to the corporate focus on establishing the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). When will performance of ALE be next reviewed?</p>	<p>The data is collated quarterly for the ASGLB. The collection period for quarter 1 has been delayed until q2 due to the impact of Covid-19. However, trends analysis from ALE suggests the performance is improving in timeliness for children and adopters. The date for the next Executive Board has yet to be set for August when the performance will be reviewed.</p>