

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 3 MARCH 2022

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present in person:

Councillor Mohammed Pappu (Chair)

Councillor Faroque Ahmed	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	– Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Leema Qureshi	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance
Councillor Andrew Wood	– Representing call in members

Members Present remotely:

Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Denise Jones

Co-opted Members Present remotely:

Halima Islam – Co-Optee

Officers Present in person:

James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children and Culture)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Joel West	(Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

Officers Present remotely:

Judith St John	(Director, Commissioning and Culture, Children's Services)
James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children and Culture)
Sharon Godman	(Director, Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Manager)
Michael Coleman	(HAC Capital Programme Manager)
David Knight	(Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

Others Present in person:

Councillor Kabir Ahmed
Councillor Sabina Akhtar

Others Present remotely:

Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Peter Golds

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

Councillor Marc Francis asked the Committee to note that his wife is Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing.

2. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

2.1 Leisure Estate Investment Plan

Call-In Members' Presentation

Call-in members presented the reasons for call-in and proposed alternative course of action, and added that:

- There were two main refurbishment options for St George's Leisure Centre, a short term option and a longer term. The short term option had not been fully explored.
- There was a marked difference in the estimate to refurbish the site compared to the Tiller Leisure Centre. It is unclear how the estimate of £9.9m to allow reopening has been calculated.
- Welcomed that the Council had since agreed to allow a tour of the building by interested persons, but conditions had been imposed which would limit the effectiveness of this tour.
- The redacted costs within the condition survey should be made available to enable a full understanding of the refurbishment options.
- There had been no clear argument made as to why a reduction in pool length is necessary. Guidance from Sport England has been referred to, but not provided.
- References had been made to housing on the site, but it was not clear if housing was necessary on the site.
- Extended closure of the school would have detrimental impact on local residents and the community. It was unclear how this was to be measured or mitigated. Unclear if the equality impact assessment has considered BAME aspects.

Following questions from Committee members, the call in members provided opinion on:

- Calculation of the short-term cost option.
- Timescale of the closure under the current proposal.

- The age and reliability of the existing condition survey.
- Redacted cost figures and the rationale for the £9.9million reopening calculation.
- Carbon and environmental impact. Had the impact of demolition and rebuild been included in the environmental impact comparisons of the options?

Lead Member's Presentation

The Lead Member for Culture, Arts and Sports, Councillor Sabina Akhtar, set out the context of the Cabinet Decision and reviewed the key elements of the decision:

- The record of decisions of the Cabinet accurately reflects the discussion at the Cabinet meeting.
- The Council's objective is to ensure that its facilities are fit for purpose, offer value for money, and meet residents' needs. The current facility does not, in the Council's informed view, achieve these objectives.
- The Council commissioned surveyors to provide an independent assessment of the condition of the building. The surveys had been shared, the redacted costs cannot be shared due to commercial confidentiality.
- The Council had worked with Friends of St George's" and had agreed to grant access to the building for them to undertake a review with the caveat that any such review must meet a demonstrably transparent standard.
- The current facility can provide a relatively limited range and quantum of facilities.
- Extending the current building is technically and financially challenging and would not provide the same quality and quantity of activities that a new facility could.
- A new facility would be built to a far higher environmental standard, reducing both its energy use and the need for extensive investment in the patch and mend of a life expired building. A new facility will have a minimum design life of 40 years.
- The relevant Sport England guidance on swimming provision and pool length will be circulated to the Committee.
- The aim of the Council's investment is to provide more facilities to allow more residents to access leisure activities in the Borough In relation to the comments regarding pool length, the additional length of the pool does not equate to more activities.
- Diving provision in the replacement leisure centre has not been ruled out.

Following questions from Committee members, the Lead Member provided more details on:

- Carbon and environmental impact of the proposal

- Feasibility of making use of the site whilst planning permission for the new build was being prepared.
- Comparison to Tiller Leisure Centre reopening cost, noting that the condition and building types were very different making the comparison unhelpful.
- Works undertaken on the site since stock condition survey.
- The calculation of the £9.9 million reopening cost, noting that the figure included various elements including fabric, plant and electrical repair.
- Engagement and consultation with local residents concerning layout and operation of changing rooms in the new building.
- The Council's plans to ensure residents and schools can access alternative leisure and swimming provision whilst St George's is closed.

Consideration of the Call In

After hearing from the Call-in Members and the Lead Member, the Committee considered the following issues and concerns:

- Timeframe and potential slippage of the proposed rebuild project.
- Lack of clarity concerning the overall carbon impact of the proposed new building, demolition, and refurbishment.
- Guidance from Sport England over pool length and funding eligibility.

Some members of the Committee indicated concern that questions still remained unanswered and they would wish to refer this matter back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

Some members of the Committee indicated concern with the reliability of the calculation of the £9.9m cost of remedial works to allow the existing St George's building to reopen, but also indicated the investment in the new site was a welcome and felt it might be counterproductive to delay this investment. They noted the Committee had explored this matter in the past and welcomed the commitment the executive had demonstrated to undertaking meaningful investment and redevelopment to secure long term community benefit.

The Chair thanked the call in members for their submission and presentation. The Committee asked that the Cabinet be informed of its concerns with

- The lack of clarity concerning whether demolition and rebuild had been included in the calculation of the carbon impact over the lifecycle of the Centre.
- The reliability of the calculation of the £9.9m estimated cost of remedial works to reopen the Centre in the short term.
- The Chair also noted the Committee would welcome the Sport England guidance concerning pool length.

As a result of discussions the Chair moved and it was **RESOLVED** that the Cabinet's decision on the Leisure Estate Investment Plan be **reaffirmed**.

3. 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.

The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.

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