

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children's and Education
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Sabina Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance (To Be Confirmed)
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Marc Francis

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Councillor Marc Francis

Officers Present in Person:

Sharon Godman	(Director Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)
Daniel Kerr	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Ann Corbett	(Director of Community Safety)
Paul Burgess	(Strategy and Policy Officer)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Charles Griggs	(Head of Community Safety)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Marc Francis who attended virtually.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2022 and 9 January 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nils Items.

5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION LOG

Members raised the Gill Street site and asked for information to be shared and action to be correctly logged.

RESOLVED:

Members Noted the Committee Work Program and Action Log

6. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members Noted the forward plan

7. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil Items.

8. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

8.1 BOROUGH COMMANDER SPOTLIGHT

Service users from the Tower Hamlets and City of London Youth Justice Service were in attendance virtually to answer questions from the committee about their experiences with the police within the borough. They highlighted that police officers can be very aggressive and subject young people to unfair searches, leaving young people to feel targeted.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Why do young people feel they are being targeted in this way from police officers? The service users stated that it was due to their age but also due to their race.
- While residents want to see greater police intervention to drug related crime, how do you think this can be balanced while not increasing stop and searches? The service users stated that stop and searches should be around suspicion and not random targeting, but also more resources should be placed in youth workers to work with young people, rather than police dealing with them first.
- Tower Hamlets is a young borough, based on the age of residents. What can the council do to support young people further? The service users reflected on youth centres and more engagement opportunities for young people to take part in. Mental Health needs to be taken more seriously and the council needs to ensure young people are supported better with their mental health issues.
- Where are the stop and search hot spots that young people are targeted? The service users stated that it is across East London, but places like Stepney, Shadwell and Whitechapel are known to be places where frequent stop and searches occur.
- What training would you like to see police officers have with young people? How do we build up more trust with young people over these issues with the police? The service users highlighted the initial contact with the police needs to be improved and how reporting to parents after a stop and search needs improvement. A training package covering mental health & learning disabilities would be an area for training.
- How would you prefer the police to engage with young people? The service users stated first the police should only be approaching young people if they have a good reason to, but when they do approach, it should come in a respectful way. A more diverse police force could ensure that stop and searches would be less likely to target young people due to their race.

The chair thanked the Youth Justice Team for their feedback to the committee and sharing their experiences.

Borough Commander Detective Chief Superintendent James Conway presented to the committee the update, highlighting, the Turnaround Plan 2023-25.

Ann Corbett, Director of Community Safety was present and commented on the need for strong community safety and local police who were aware of the diverse borough of Tower Hamlets.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- What is behind the disproportionate stop and search frequency of residents of colour within the borough? DCS Conway stated that there needs to be greater understanding of why police are stop and

searching certain groups of residents. Looking at both Tower Hamlets and Hackney Boroughs, which are both covered as Commander, it is different demographics that are stop and searched at a higher level.

- There are concerns about the reduction in the safer neighbourhood teams and the impact this has on community safety, especially during the night-time. DCS Conway reported on the work of dedicated ward teams, but mentioned the lighter resourcing on neighbourhood policing teams but more work is being done locally and nationally on recruitment.
- There needs to be a more open and honest conversation about racism within the police. It was helpful to hear a commitment about removing officers who should not be with the police force, but also the police as an organisation needs to also be creating the right environment to tackle racism too. DCS Conway agreed that it was an important conversation, and the police is still confronting many of the issues that have been raised by the committee on racism within policing. But it also needs to be larger conversation out in the community, to ensure that police within the community are Tower Hamlets branded.
- What is the current staffing within the borough, how many are within the BAME Community? And can data also be provided on women within the police? DCS Conway confirmed he would provide a written response on this.
- What is being done to tackle youth violence and gang activity? How is the police engaging with young people? DCS Conway was supportive of the current police strategy on dealing with youth and gang violence, but more needs to be done. Ann Corbett confirmed that there was a downward trend in youth violence and with the local partnership has recently installed knife bins across the borough, along with other initiatives.
- What is being done to tackle child grooming within the borough? DCS Conway detailed the police efforts to end child exploitation within the borough, and the joined up approach to working with organisations across the capital and within other regions. Ann Corbett detailed the work the child exploitation team does in the community and working with the police.
- The lack of resourcing within neighbourhood policing is affecting many wards within the borough, with the number of abstractions of local policing taking teams away over 50-70 per cent in some wards. Will the Borough Commander share the most recent data on abstractions, and can there be commitment to reduce abstractions? Wards should have dedicated officers within them, this is important to building local relationships in locally and act as a deterrent to the concerns raised by committee members. DCS Conway detailed how London has a unique policing need, with the importance of neighbourhood policing, along with dealing with national events that happen in the capital, however recruitment plans are underway to see more resourcing. But also, work is being done to ensure a stronger model for neighbourhood policing within the Turnaround Plan, but unfortunately commitments cannot be

made to abstractions at this time. DCS Conway agreed to provide further data to the committee on abstractions.

- There have been recent cases of children reporting domestic violence within the home, that is not being acted on. What is the current procedure around reporting and how effective is it? DCS Conway agreed to follow up on the recent cases, but detailed how the current reporting is recorded and acted on. The performance in borough on domestic abuse charging is one of the highest within the Metropolitan police but more can be done in supporting victims. DCS Conway agreed to provide further data to the committee on convictions on domestic abuse.
- Modern day slavery is a concern within the borough, what can we do to ensure exploitation is not happening within Tower Hamlets? DCS Conway detailed how officers are currently trained to detect modern day slavery and often detection comes from other forms of police work, and slavery or exploitation is picked up.
- What work is being done to work with faith organisations to deal with crime within the borough? DCS Conway stated how important faith organisations are within Tower Hamlets and their engagement with young people is important to raising awareness of interventions already in place.

The chair thanked Detective Chief Superintendent James Conway for attending and presenting to the committee.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the presentation.

9. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

9.1 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

This item has been withdrawn

9.2 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE MONITORING BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

This item has been withdrawn

10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Councillor Abdul Mannan gave an update on housing & regeneration and highlighted the recent consultation of the future of services for people living in council homes.

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury gave an update on Children's & Education and highlighted the launch of the Education Maintenance Allowance and University Bursary schemes.

Councillor Sabina Khan gave an update for Resources and Finance and highlighted the food poverty review, including energy poverty. Councillor Ahmodur Khan gave an update on Health & Adults and highlighted the scrutiny session on workforce.

Councillor Abdul Malik gave an update on Community Safety and highlighted the recent scrutiny session on women's safety.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the updates.

11. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Members noted the Cabinet Papers and did not wish to raise any questions.

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

Nil items

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

16. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 08:37

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee