

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 3 APRIL 2007

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

Members Present:

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman (Chair)
Councillor A A Sardar (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Shahed Ali
Councillor Clair Hawkins
Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Shamim A. Chowdhury
Councillor Ahmed Hussain
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Dulal Uddin

Co-opted Members Present:

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Officers Present:

Alan Steward	– (Policy Scrutiny Manager)
Graham White	– (Legal Adviser)
Sara Williams	– (Assistant Chief Executive)
Alex Cosgrave	– (Corporate Director, Environment & Culture)
Chris Holme	– (Service Head, Resources, Development & Renewal)
Afazul Hoque	– (Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Emma Peters	– (Corporate Director, Development & Renewal)
Angus Dixon	– (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Simon Rouse for whom Councillor Peter Golds was deputising, and Councillor Shiria Khatun for whom Councillor Ahmed Omer was deputising.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman declared a personal interest in relation to item 7.1 due to his involvement with an RSL.

Councillor Peter Golds declared a personal interest in relation to item 8.2 due to his professional contact with previous employees of Verve.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **MOVED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the Section 1 Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 6th March, 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

No requests to submit petitions had been received.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

One deputation request had been received on the subject of Ocean New Deal for Communities.

The Chair welcomed the deputation and asked it's representatives to address the meeting. Ms Brenda Daley, on behalf of the deputation, presented to the Committee that the new proposal for Ocean has ignored the views of the residents, is a 'backdoor' towards stock transfer, and needs to be genuinely consulted upon with residents. Mr Colin Harris, on behalf of the deputation, presented the concerns of the Ocean Business Association. These included that businesses appear to have been paid little regard in the Cabinet report, are suffering from the uncertainty that is surrounding the estate, and also need to be consulted with on the proposals.

The Deputation responded to a series of questions put by Members covering whether following meaningful consultation the proposed model could benefit the estate and how should the Council perform this consultation with residents.

The Chair thanked the deputation for its attendance.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

6.1 REPORT CALLED IN - Disposal of Railway Arms, Shadwell

6.2 REPORT CALLED IN - Sale of The British Prince Public House

6.3 REPORT CALLED IN - Disposal of 34 Linford Drive, Basildon Essex

At the request of the Chair, Sara Williams, Assistant Chief Executive, presented the call-in procedure to the Committee. The Committee agreed with the call-in members that due to the similar nature of the items and concerns they would be dealt with as one item.

Councillors Shamim Chowdhury and Ahmed Hussain for the call-in Members outlined the main issue that they held with the proposed property disposals – namely that they were concerned whether the community would benefit. They believed that there were other options for the land which may not have been adequately considered such as for use for local housing or community space. Additionally they commented sales should not be conducted on the open market as this would make them unaffordable for voluntary sector groups.

Committee Members put detailed questions to the Lead Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Joshua Peck, and the Corporate Director, Environment and Culture, Alex Cosgrave, on a number of issues including when the facilities were last used and why the Council was selling them

Councillor Bawden and Ms Cosgrave responded in detail on the points raised stating that the facilities have not been in use for several years and that Adult Services and Children's Services have stated that they could not effectively utilise the facilities.

The Committee considered that whilst there are issues to be resolved these can be adequately considered at the planning stage. Therefore the decisions did not need to be referred back to Cabinet. The Committee felt however that the Local Area Partnerships should be kept informed at each stage of the disposals in order that they may identify opportunities for community facilities to be integrated in the sites.

7. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Ocean New Deal for Communities

At the request of the Chair, Sara Williams, Assistant Chief Executive, explained that this item had been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and advice prior to Cabinet determination.

The Lead Member for Housing and Development, Councillor Rupert Bawden, and the Corporate Director Development and Renewal, Emma Peters, explained the proposal and emphasised key points including the urgency with which it needed to be progressed, and that the proposal was only a model and therefore wider public consultation would take place at a later stage. Ms Peters also informed the Committee that the model provided the basic minimum conditions of:

- No net loss of affordable housing.
- Re-provision of community facilities.
- Refurbishment of 808 remaining properties.

Members raised a number of questions and concerns with Councillor Bawden and Ms Peters including the lack of contingency planning that had been undertaken regarding the Housing Choice process, flexibility of the feeder sights within the model, any plans to put more land into the proposed Trust in the future, how the consultation was going to take place, and if there would be any compulsory relocation of residents.

Councillor Bawden and Ms Peters responded on the points raised reminding the Committee that this is the very initial stages, that it will be 12-18 months before a partner would be selected and in total they were looking at a 7 year programme. They reiterated that transformational change was needed on the Estate and that this was an opportunity to address its deterioration.

The Committee felt that there were important issues surrounding the report to Cabinet and its practical implications to residents of Ocean Estate which they wished to highlight to Cabinet.

The Committee discussed the overarching situation noting that essential to the success of any regeneration scheme for Ocean (and other housing estates within the borough) was to bring local residents and businesses on-board with the proposal. Although the proposed scheme was a model to demonstrate the financial viability of the Community Land Trust, it would have a practical impact on local people and businesses. Recognising this, it was vitally important that the Council make strenuous efforts to communicate the reasons for the urgency and that there be significant and detailed consultation and involvement with local people and businesses.

More specifically, Members felt that in agreeing the proposal for Ocean Estate the Cabinet must consider the following:

- Transparent and genuine consultation must take place with residents and businesses so they can shape significantly the future of Ocean Estate.

- For residents that are living in temporary accommodation, it is vital that any changes as a result of the proposed scheme are managed carefully to minimise the impact on their circumstances.
- That the overall phasing of the scheme, including decanting and new properties, must be managed carefully to minimise the impact on local schools, healthcare and other facilities.
- Significant efforts must be made to involve leaseholders in the changes and that they can also benefit from the transformation of the Ocean Estate.
- The potential impact on the profitability of local businesses as a result of the proposed regeneration needs to be carefully considered and steps taken to minimise any negative impact.
- To continue to explore the potential for alternative feeder sites that will ensure that the proposed Community Land Trust is financially viable and will achieve the long term regeneration of the estate including community facilities.
- The process of appointing the Ocean Regeneration Trust (ORT) Board must be set-out following best practice that demonstrates transparency and shows clearly how local people are driving the regeneration scheme.
- The Trust must be established and operate so that it can use ongoing income to provide a sustainable and long term future for the community organisations and facilities that serve local people.

The Chair **Moved** and it was

RESOLVED

That the above views of the Committee in respect to Ocean Estate be forwarded to Cabinet for its consideration.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

8.1 Tower Hamlets Index - Monitoring Report BV Summary 2006/07

Councillor Joshua Peck, Lead Member for Performance and Resources introduced the report. and drew attention to a recent achievement that had been made that the Borough no longer had any families living in Bed and Breakfast or Hostel accommodation. The Committee congratulated the service on achieving this.

The Committee also discussed issues including the connectivity and relationship between the areas of school attendance, education, the achievement of groups and ultimately employment.

The Chair **MOVED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

8.2 Contract for Provision of Strategic Communications Support

The Lead Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Joshua Peck, and the Interim Director of Resources, Julie Parker, summarised the report stating that there were lessons to be learnt from the Council's experience with the Verve communications contract with regard to procurement and management.

The Committee put a number of questions to Councillor Peck and Ms Parker including the length of time taken to fill the Head of Communications role, the procurement and monitoring processes followed, and why the use of the company via this contract had exceeded its original estimated total value to such a large degree.

Councillor Peck and Ms Parker responded on the points raised and stated that the procurement process had been conducted satisfactorily and value for money had been properly considered. However there were aspects of the management of the contract which could have been more closely managed and there are now improved processes in place. They also commented that future contracts would follow a clearer "framework" format with closer monitoring and there was currently a review of the procurement team being undertaken with a view to improving its performance.

The Chair **MOVED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the report on the Contract for Provision of Strategic Communications be noted and the findings utilised in the Scrutiny Lead for 'Excellent Public Services', Councillor Simon Rouse's, broader review on use of consultants.

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

There were no section one pre-decision items scrutinised.

10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Scrutiny Lead for Health, Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique, provided a brief update to the Committee on the activities of the Health Scrutiny Panel and this was noted.

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair **MOVED** and it was: -

RESOLVED

That in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of the Section Two business on the grounds that it contained information defined as exempt or confidential in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government, Act 1972.

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

The Committee discussed the pre-decision questions that had been submitted. Concern was expressed that the report going before Cabinet was brief and may not contain adequate information on which to make an informed decision. Graham White, Legal Services, advised that an addendum report was being prepared and would be circulated prior to the Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Shahed Ali **MOVED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the questions be submitted to Cabinet for consideration as tabled.

The meeting ended at 9.50 p.m.

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Chair, Council