

Meeting of the

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 1 May 2007 at 7.00 p.m.

A G E N D A

VENUE

M71, 7th Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London,
E14 2BG

Members:	Deputies (if any):
Chair: Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman Vice-Chair: Councillor A A Sardar	
Councillor Simon Rouse Councillor Shahed Ali Councillor Clair Hawkins Councillor Shiria Khatun Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique Councillor Stephanie Eaton Councillor Oliur Rahman	Councillor Louise Alexander, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Stephanie Eaton) Councillor Shamim A. Chowdhury, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Shahed Ali and Oliur Rahman) Councillor Peter Golds, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Simon Rouse) Councillor Ahmed Hussain, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Shahed Ali and Oliur Rahman) Councillor Abjol Miah, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Shahed Ali and Oliur Rahman) Councillor Fozol Miah, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Shahed Ali and Oliur Rahman) Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Motin Uz-Zaman, A A Sardar, Clair Hawkins, Shiria Khatun and

Mohammed Abdus Salique)
Councillor M. Shahid Ali, (Designated
Deputy representing Councillors Motin Uz-
Zaman, A A Sardar, Clair Hawkins, Shiria
Khatun and Mohammed Abdus Salique)
Councillor Alexander Heslop, (Designated
Deputy representing Councillors Motin Uz-
Zaman, A A Sardar, Clair Hawkins, Shiria
Khatun and Mohammed Abdus Salique)

[Note: The quorum for this body is 4 voting Members].

Co-opted Members:

Mr H Mueenuddin	– Muslim Community Representative
Mr D McLaughlin	– Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster Representative

If you require any further information relating to this meeting, would like to request a large print, Braille or audio version of this document, or would like to discuss access arrangements or any other special requirements, please contact: Angus Dixon, Democratic Services, Tel: 020 7364 4850, E-mail: angus.dixon@towerhamlets.gov.uk

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 1 May 2007

7.00 p.m.

SECTION ONE

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To note any declarations of interest made by Members, including those restricting Members from voting on the questions detailed in Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992.

Note from the Chief Executive

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, Members must declare any **personal interests** they have in any item on the agenda or as they arise during the course of the meeting. Members must orally indicate to which item their interest relates. If a Member has a personal interest he/she must also consider whether or not that interest is a **prejudicial personal interest** and take the necessary action. When considering whether or not they have a declarable interest, Members should consult pages 181 to 184 of the Council's Constitution. Please note that all Members present at a Committee meeting (in whatever capacity) are required to declare any personal or prejudicial interests.

A **personal interest** is, generally, one that would affect a Member (either directly or through a connection with a relevant person or organisation) more than other people in London, in respect of the item of business under consideration at the meeting. If a member of the public, knowing all the relevant facts, would view a Member's personal interest in the item under consideration as so substantial that it would appear likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest, then the Member has a **prejudicial personal interest**.

Consequences:

- If a Member has a **personal interest**: he/she must declare the interest but can stay, speak and vote.
- If the Member has **prejudicial personal interest**: he/she must declare the interest, cannot speak or vote on the item and must leave the room.

When declaring an interest, Members are requested to specify the nature of the interest, the particular agenda item to which the interest relates and to also specify whether the interest is of a personal or personal and prejudicial nature. This procedure is designed to assist the public's understanding of the meeting and is also designed to enable a full entry to be made in the Statutory Register of Interests which is kept by the Head of Democratic Renewal and Engagement on behalf of the Monitoring Officer.

3.	UNRESTRICTED MINUTES	1 - 8
	To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 rd April, 2007.	
4.	REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS	
	To be notified at the meeting.	
5.	REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS	
	To be notified at the meeting.	
6.	SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'	
	There were no Section One reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 4 April 2007.	
7.	SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT - CUSTOMER ACCESS	
	There will be a presentation on the challenges and opportunities facing the Council with provision for questions and discussion.	
8.	PERFORMANCE MONITORING	
8.1	User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review	9 - 38
9.	SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT	
9.1	Leaseholders and Customer Care	39 - 64
9.2	Graduate Unemployment	65 - 86
9.3	Draft Annual Report	87 - 104
10.	PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) CABINET PAPERS	
	(Time allocated – 30 minutes).	
11.	ANY OTHER SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT	

SECTION TWO

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

In view of the contents of the remaining items on the agenda the Committee is recommended to adopt the following motion:

“That, under 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 contains information defined as Exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.”

EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL SECTION (Pink Papers)

The exempt committee papers in the agenda will contain information, which is commercially, legally or personally sensitive and should not be divulged to third parties. If you do not wish to retain these papers after the meeting, please hand them to the Committee Officer present.

13. RESTRICTED MINUTES

105 - 106

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the restricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd April, 2007.

14. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section Two reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 4th April, 2007.

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

(Time allocated 15 minutes).

16. ANY OTHER SECTION TWO (RESTRICTED) BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

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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:

–

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.

SUMMARY OF EXEMPT PROCEEDINGS

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

The Committee discussed the pre-decision questions that had been submitted.

The meeting ended at 9.50 p.m.

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Chair, Council

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Agenda Item 8.1

Committee Overview and Scrutiny	Date 1 May 2007	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. 8.1
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): Louise Russell, Head of Strategy & Performance		Title: Continuous Improvement Programme 2006/07 User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review and Improvement Plan May 2007 Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the Continuous Improvement Programme 2006/07 User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review and Improvement Plan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to review and comment on the findings, emerging principles and Improvement Plan

3 Introduction

- 3.1 The User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review was identified as part of the Council's Continuous Improvement Programme. The review, through identification of good practice throughout the organisation, partner agencies and external examples, as well as research into current thinking and theory and the potential requirements of the Local Government White Paper, aims to help respond to emerging good practice in maximising the potential for user voice, choice and co-production. The review's aimed to examine how we can maximise User Voice, Choice and Co-Production opportunities across the Council and the Tower Hamlets Partnership, and use the learning from within the Partnership, external organisations and current thinking, to improve service delivery and outcomes, increase user satisfaction and identify efficiency savings.
- 3.2 This report summarises the key findings and actions from the full review. The full review is attached as **Appendix A**.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

Continuous Improvement Programme 2006/07
User Voice, Choice and Co-Production
Review & Improvement Plan
May 2007

Name and telephone number of and address where open to
inspection

Report Attached

4. Aims and Objectives

- 4.2 The aim of the project has been to develop a clear corporate approach to user voice, choice and co-production for the Council and Partnership which incorporates existing and planned work, establishing a framework for future work, and learning from and incorporating emerging good practice.
- 4.3 Improvement actions identified will be incorporated in the review of the Tower Hamlets Community Strategy, the Council's 2007/08 Strategic Plan and individual service and team plans, and an Improvement Plan has been developed to ensure the areas for improvement identified in the review are implemented.

5. Summary of Key Activities

- 5.1 Key work undertaken as part of the review includes a review of user engagement activities across the Council and partner agencies. The examples have been used to develop emerging themes and principles.
- 5.2 In January 2007 a Strategy Challenge workshop was held to examine the review findings to develop a framework of aims, objectives and principles. Also in January 2007, we consulted local people regarding performance information. The findings from the forum have been incorporated into the Improvement Plan.
- 5.3 A draft Improvement Plan has been developed with key stakeholders and the project Steering Group and is attached at **Appendix B**.

6. Definition

- 6.1 For the purposes of the review the three key terms have been defined as follows:
- Voice:** Residents and service users influencing the way services are designed delivered and monitored.
- Choice:** Offering residents and service users choice about where, whether, by whom and how services are provided.
- Co-Production:** Clients and citizens contributing alongside professionals in public agencies to service delivery and outcomes.

7. Findings from the Review

- 7.1 **Voice:** throughout the review we found many examples of user voice. These fell into 6 main categories
- User Forums with service users/client groups
 - Structured frameworks (e.g. LAPs)
 - Public consultation events
 - Engagement activity around specific policies / developments
 - Regular customer feedback
 - User Involvement in service planning
- There were also good examples of voice activities engaging with a wide range of service users and hard to reach groups. It was also noted that the Consultation and Involvement Framework and the Consultation Calendar helped facilitate good practice throughout the Partnership.

- 7.2 **Choice:** there are a number of specific examples of user choice in service delivery but less choice is less prevalent than user voice. Examples of choice tend to be found in individual focused services such as Children’s and Adult’s Services rather than more communal services. Examples of choice are also coupled with high quality information and support to ensure all can access choice. Choice is a key theme of the Customer Access Strategy.
- 7.3 **Co-production:** The review found there were many examples of services users being engaged to help better deliver a wide range of services. There were also a number of examples of volunteering as a form of co-production, for example, Environment Volunteers. The review has also identified examples of co-production in which service users are “experts” involved in sharing knowledge and skills, and championing causes. Co-Production is also represented by third sector involvement in service delivery.
- 8. Improving Information**
- 8.1 In order to exercise voice, choice and become involved in co-production residents will increasingly demand better and more accessible performance information to hold service providers to account. At the residents focus groups, residents were consulted on:
- The type of performance information they would like to be provided with; and
 - The most useful format for this information to be provided in.
- 8.2 The following key points emerged from the consultation:
- Residents prefer more focus on “outcome” indicators, rather than “perception” indicators;
 - Indicators need to be statistically meaningful and easily understood, and to give comparable information where available, and be broken down, e.g. ward level, ethnicity where possible.
 - When reporting information, give context, e.g. activities under taken to achieve these results, and explanations where impact was not what was expected. As part of this costs should be included.
 - Layout is important, information should be well presented and easy to understand, the use of symbols where appropriate is popular. However, if too “professional”, people are suspicious of cost.
- 9. Principles**
- 9.1 One of the aims of this review was to develop a set of key principles to guide the Tower Hamlets Partnership and key service providers to ensure that we maximise opportunities for voice, choice and co-production across all our work. The following principles for the greater deployment of User Voice, Choice and Co-Production have been identified;

9.2 **Voice;**

- All services should provide good quality information to their service users;
- Each directorate should consider through team and service planning voice and user engagement;
- Consultation should be proportionate to an issue and be realistic in terms of clarity with local residents about any constraints and what they can and cannot influence;
- All Voice initiatives should commit to consultation good practice principles;
- Equity is achieved through seeking to ensuring balanced representation in surveys and focus groups, and;
- Increased Partnership wide use should be made of the Consultation Calendar.

9.3 **Choice;**

- All services should seek to offer choice in terms of methods of customer access;
- It is not applicable that all services offer choice about delivery mechanisms;
- All services should ensure choice is reflected in their team and directorate plan;
- Choice should be, and in many cases is, offered to individuals receiving personal services;
- Choice could be further expanded and become appropriate for communal services, and;
- In order to ensure fairness of public sector provision, detailed planning is required and safeguards necessary, such as, high levels of information and support;

9.4 **Co-Production**

- All services should consider Co-Production within the development of the team and directorate plan;
- Whilst it is not applicable for all services to offer co-production to its full extent, many services could offer aspects of co-production, building on voice opportunities, particularly in the planning, design and monitoring of service delivery;
- Maximising co-production is particularly important in terms of achieving outcomes which require changing behaviours and attitudes;
- Residents volunteering directly to support service provision and/or behaviour change is a form of co-production;
- The benefits to both services and individuals need to be clear at the offset, i.e. incentives to individual service users.
- In order to maximise the involvement of service users in the delivery of services, consultation exercises should begin early on, and;
- Co-production has the potential for positive impacts on service users, including increased social capacity and transferable skills;

10 **Key Areas for Improvement**

10.1 The following key areas for improvement have been identified through this review. These areas have been developed into an Improvement Plan, attached as **Appendix B**.

- Enabling Residents to hold us to account
- Building on and embedding user focus across the Partnership
- Further develop Partnership approach to choice & co-production
- Improving choice in Customer Access

11. **Next Steps**

11.1 We are currently consulting on the initially identified Principles and Improvement Areas, prior to the development of a Final Report and Improvement Plan. These will be submitted to Cabinet in June 2007.

11.2 Overview and Scrutiny committee are invited to comment on the review, principles emerging and the Improvement Areas and possible actions to inform the final report.

12. **Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)**

12.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report

13. **Comments from the Chief Finance Officer**

13.1. As the report points out, there are opportunities in promoting voice and choice initiatives to ensure that resources are allocated more effectively towards service delivery that will meet user needs. This can lead to better cost effectiveness of public services.

13.2 The report also recognises that there are direct costs involved in providing opportunities for people to influence service delivery and to exercise choice, and this is particularly true where difficult to reach groups are involved. This makes it particularly important that voice and choice opportunities are effective in influencing and improving services. In engaging with citizens, it is also important to be clear that there is ultimately a trade-off between improving public services and funding that improvement.

13.3 As the Medium Term Financial Plan indicates, financial resources are expected to tighten considerably over the next few years. The implementation of the voice, choice and co-production agenda will need to be incorporated into the authority's strategic and financial planning process.

13.4. Underlying all of these principles, part of the process of facilitating voice and choice will be to provide high quality public information on service performance and costs.

13.5. Appendix A indicates that the majority of the actions proposed can take place within existing resources. Where this is not the case, additional

resources may need to be identified through the 2008/09 budget process.

14. Equalities Implications

14.1 When developing increased opportunities for voice, choice and co-production, it is important that to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to engage and access them. The development of a corporate approach and partnership framework will include advise on how to ensure representative consultation and how to target different groups. The emerging principles have been developed to maximise equity.

15. Anti Poverty Comments

15.1 Many of the examples in the review illustrate that increasing user involvement in service planning and delivery can help to increase both social and individual capacity, including confidence building, transferable skills and communication skills, all of which can help lead to jobs and paid work opportunities for some members of the community, thus tackling poverty.

16. Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

16.1 Service improvements in this area will result from the greater involvement of local residents in protecting and promoting a better environment, for example in recycling, street cleanliness and green space maintenance.

17.1 Risk Management Implications

17.2 A Partnership wide project board and action plan will be developed to ensure that any improvements activities identified are implemented and service improvements monitored. This will confirm with the Council's project management methodology which requires that all risks are identified and managed.

Appendices:

Appendix A - User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review Full Report

Appendix B – User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Improvement Plan

Appendix A

Continuous Improvement Programme User Voice, Choice and Co-Production: Review April 2007

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review was identified as part of the council's Continuous Improvement Programme. The review, through identification of good practice throughout the organisation, partner agencies and external examples, as well as research into current thinking and theory and the potential requirements of the Local Government White Paper, aims to help respond to emerging good practice in maximising the potential for user voice, choice and co-production. The review's aimed to examine how we can maximise User Voice, Choice and Co-Production opportunities across the council and the Tower Hamlets Partnership, and use the learning from within the Partnership, external organisations and current thinking, to improve service delivery and outcomes, increase user satisfaction and identify efficiency savings.
- 1.2 This report summarises the key learning from the review, the emerging principles developed in conjunction with stakeholders and partners and a set of key areas for improvement. A detailed Improvement Plan is attached at Appendix A. Following comments from CMT, this report will be presented to the Members' Performance and Improvement Group in May and to Cabinet in June.

1.3 Structure of Report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2 Aims & Objectives**
This section states the Aims & Objectives of the User Voice, Choice and Co-Production Review as decided by the corporate Continuous Improvement Programme.
- **Section 3 Activities to date**
This summarises the key activities carried out as part of the review to achieve the Aims and Objectives.
- **Section 4 Definition & Context**
This defines the key concepts explored in the review and develops an understanding of the key drivers and context for increased user involvement and participation in service delivery.
- **Section 5 Learning & Best Practice**
Section 5 examines some of the emerging thinking and examples of best practice around each individual element; Voice, Choice and Co-Production.
- **Section 6 Emerging Findings**
This section examines the key findings of the review of user engagement activities across the Partnership.
- **Section 7 Emerging Principles**

This section sets out the principles emerging from the review, good practice research and challenge workshop.

- **Section 8 Key Areas for Improvement**
Section 8 details the Key Improvement Areas that have been established through the review.
- **Appendix A Improvement Plan**
A full Improvement Plan, identifying milestones and resource requirements for activities, is set out at Appendix A.

2. Aims & Objectives

- 2.1 A key driver for the government's modernising agenda is increasing the involvement of local people in local government. User Voice, Choice and Co-Production are terms increasingly applied to public sector delivery. The recent Local Government White Paper specifically aims for responsive services and empowered communities; *"people no longer accept the "one size fits all" service models of old. They want choice over the services they receive., influence over those who provide them and higher service standards...We want this to be the case everywhere – for people to be given more control over their lives; consulted and involved in the running of services; informed about the quality of services in their area; and enabled to call local agencies to account if they fail to meet their needs".¹*
- 2.2 The aim of the project has been to develop a clear corporate approach to user voice, choice and co-production for the council and partnership which incorporates existing and planned work, establishing a framework for future work, and learning from and incorporating emerging good practice.
- 2.3 Improvement actions identified will be incorporated in the review of the Tower Hamlets Community Strategy, the Council's 2007/08 Strategic Plan and individual service and team plans, and an Improvement Plan has been developed (appendix A) to ensure the areas for improvement identified in the review are implemented.

3. Activities to Date

- 3.1 Key work undertaken as part of review includes:
- 3.2 A review of user engagement activities across the Council and partner agencies. The review was in no way inclusive of all such activities, but provides a broad cross section. The examples have been used to develop emerging themes and principles.
- 3.3 From the review, 3 case studies, Catering Forum, Leaving Care Team and Choice Based Lettings, were identified and developed. The case studies highlight the benefits to service delivery and service users of the different levels of user engagement. They will also been used to help to develop the key principles and framework for managers.

¹ *Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper 2006, Summary.* Department for Communities and Local Government, p2.

- 3.4 In January 2007, a Strategy Challenge Workshop was held to examine the review findings to develop a framework of aims, objectives and principles. Challenge partners including senior managers, Members, and key officers from Partner organisations attended the workshop. The findings from the workshop have been incorporated into the key improvement findings.
- 3.5 Also in January 2007, we consulted local people regarding performance information. Residents attending the panel were consulted about what performance information people thought would be useful to enable them to judge how well the council was improving in certain key areas, and how and where they wanted to see this information displayed. The findings from the forum have been incorporated into the Improvement Plan.
- 3.6 The emerging findings and areas for improvement have been circulated for comment to the Partnership through members of the Partnership Management Group and Excellent Public Services CPAG, reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and circulated to other members for comment.
- 3.7 A choice based Customer Access strategy is also being developed as part of this review, to be lead by the head of Customer Access. The strategy will be considered in June prior to formal agreement by elected members.
- 3.8 A draft Improvement Plan has been developed with key stakeholders and the project Steering Group and is attached at Appendix A.

4. Definition and Context

- 4.1 It is important to first define Voice, Choice and Co-Production, and what they can mean to service providers, and those who receive services either directly or indirectly. It is important to show the relationships that can exist between the three. It is also useful to highlight the “type” of service Voice, Choice and Co-Production can be appropriate for, e.g. front line or more internally facing, and the distinction between communal services, used by all, such as refuse collection and street cleaning – and personal services delivered direct to individuals, particularly in the areas of health and social care, where “consumer” type choice may be appropriate.
- 4.2 For the purposes of the review the three key terms have been defined as follows:

Voice: *“residents and service users influencing the way services are designed delivered and monitored”*. Both provision of information and ensuring an active and functioning consultative mechanism are essential to ensuring services understand the needs of service users, which underpins both choice and co-production. Voice can also

encompass providing residents with a voice and influence over service delivery through formal structures such as Local Area Partnerships within the Tower Hamlets Partnership.

Choice: *“offering residents and service users choice about where, whether, by whom and how services are provided”*. Choice can be either individual/personal or exercised more communally through deliberative or democratic forums.

Co-Production: *“clients and citizens contributing alongside professionals in public agencies to service delivery and outcomes.”* There is a broad spectrum of co-production, It can encompass citizens consciously altering their lifestyles to support community objectives such as recycling or better health; engaging in individual voluntary activity such as working with a local youth group; establishing local action groups such as Neighbourhood Watch or management of green spaces; or more formally running public services or facilities through partnership or commissioning arrangements.

4.3 In seeking to define terms, it is nevertheless important to recognise that the distinctions are not always clear cut. There is much fluidity in the categorisations, and initiatives increasing user participation can often encompass more than one aspect of voice, choice and co-production. For example, an initiative could be actively engaging service users in consultative engagement offering voice, but also be empowering users to be co– producers in terms of different levels of service control.

4.4 Whilst recognising that there is fluidity in the categorisation, and that a number of initiatives border both Voice and Choice, or Voice and Co-Production for example, for simplicity, we have tried to categorise activities in terms of the main aspects of the three elements which they exhibit.

4.5 Drivers for User Voice, Choice and Co-Production

User Voice, Choice and Co-Production are terms increasingly applied to public sector delivery. The recent Lyons Inquiry into Local Government stated one of the underlying causes of structural and funding challenges within local government was due to a lack of effective engagement with citizens. A key recommendation from Lyons is to better “engage with local communities to understand what the local choices are in broader debates of major policy issues”.² Also, a key element of the recent Prime Minister’s Policy Review “Building on Progress: Public Services”, was the importance of taking further steps to empower citizens to shape services around them, or “providing the tools, the information and the mechanisms necessary for citizens to

² Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, Sir Michael Lyons, March 2007.

exercise effective influence over services so that they change to meet their needs”³.

- 4.6 However, despite the push toward local government enabling proactive community involvement, service providers should be clear about the benefits of offering User Voice, Choice and Co-Production, in terms of improvements to service standards, efficiencies and user satisfaction.
- 4.7 Increasing user involvement through Voice and Co-Production should enable resources to be better channelled more effectively into activities that meet the needs of the service user. This is both a driver of service improvement, and can lead to efficiency savings, through the ensuring ‘best fit’ in terms of services provided and those required by users and thus enabling the elimination of wasteful or under-used service options.
- 4.8 There can be increased costs associated with offering Voice, Choice and Co-Production, for example, consultation costs, increasing information to ensure effective choice and providing frameworks within which Co-Production can operate. These additional costs can however lead to improvements and efficiencies but in order to realise these they must be planned in, quantified and monitored. Service providers need to be able to identify and measure the service improvements arising from the introduction of Voice, Choice and Co-Production. The “added value” to performance and the impact on unit costs needs to be measure and compared.

5. Learning & Best Practice

- 5.1 Whilst a key part of this review has been to learn from user engagement initiatives and best practice from within the Partnership, it is also important to learn from initiatives in other authorities and organisations nationally, particularly those held up by the government as best practice.

5.2 Voice

- 5.2.1 **Corporate & Consistent Voice** – A key theme in much emerging thinking is the importance of a consistent corporate voice, that gives accurate and comprehensive information, is professional and competent and given by staff who are friendly, polite and sympathetic of customer needs⁴. Also, Mori survey data linked satisfaction with a council, to whether they were perceived to keep residents informed. They found “*that many councils rated as relatively poor communicators were underperforming when considering residents overall satisfaction as a place to live*”⁵. This research demonstrates the importance of

³ Building on progress: Public Services. Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, Policy Review. March 2007

⁴ *Charter Mark Review: The Customer Voice in Transforming Customer Services*, Brian Herdan, June 2006.

⁵ *Contact with Residents: Best Practice Guide for Local Government*, Mori, November 2005.

ensuring good practice in how we talk to our residents both via the provision of performance information, and through consultation. Portsmouth's report card (see below) was used in the recent "Local Government White Paper: Strong & Prosperous Communities" as an example of good communication of performance information. Portsmouth's Report Card was used as an example when consulting residents in the January consultation activity. (6.5 below).

Portsmouth's Report Card

Portsmouth's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) uses a local Report Card to provide information to local people about key performance. Within each policy area, achievements and improvements (for example GCSE results, residents' concerns about crime and teenage pregnancy) are quantified along with commentary on remaining challenges. Information about what is being done and suggestions as to how local people can help are also set out. The regular publication of these figures in the Report Card enables communities, council members and officers to identify priority issues and share responsibility for finding and implementing solutions.

- 5.2.2 User Focus in Service Planning** – Service providers should be clear about who they are providing services for, and why and how they are providing them. Increasing service user input into service planning and service review is one way of ensuring this in order to be clearer about what should be being delivered, based on an understanding of local need and taking into account wastage that can be eliminated and potential efficiency gains made.

Whilst examples of direct user involvement in service planning are less common, it is increasingly being held up as good practice. For example, the IDeA has recently published a paper "Putting the Public first through Performance Management", exploring the relationship between performance management and public involvement, not only at the planning stage, but throughout the performance management cycle, and how it can be used to drive performance "A *better understanding of how people feel think and behave informs efforts to improve.*"⁷

- 5.2.3** Consultation can be viewed as part of the research process, an undertaking to ensure resident or service user views can be included in the decision making process, improving the quality of policies and strategies. Consultation should always be genuine, and consultees should be informed that their views will be considered along with other information streams. It is also important that consultees receive feedback on decisions reached. Consultation is relevant to front line and internal facing services, and to communal and individual delivery. Resident consultation regarding the Local Development Framework (LDF), where resident views have to be looked at in conjunction with population projections, funding etc, is an example of this.

⁷ *Putting the Public first through Performance Management*; www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk

Participatory Budgeting (PB) – Newcastle City Council

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a means of involving local communities in planning, participation and process of deciding what council budgets are spent on. Community groups work with council officers to decide local priorities and then present their proposals in front of a public audience, who vote on which projects to fund. Up and down the country thousands are now taking part, deciding how public money is spent. Newcastle City Council used PB this year to allocate £60,000 to its cleaner, safer, greener communities programme and its scheme for children and young people. "The response from communities has been fantastic," says Neil Smith, a policy officer "It's transparent, and so avoids the myths about how money is being spent; it's quicker voting at 'decision days' is done electronically and on the spot, and having been involved in the decision making, people feel better about themselves and their community." The World Bank, the UN, the EU and the UK's Department for International Development have all praised PB for its transparency and effectiveness. The feedback from communities is also overwhelmingly positive. An evaluation of a recent decision day in Newcastle revealed that more than 70% of delegates thought PB was good for the neighbourhood, a good way of getting people involved, and would take part in a similar day again. What's more, it did not just attract the "same faces" as is too often the case with new initiatives. Forty per cent of those attending had not previously taken part in community events. PB ties in with the government's agendas of active citizenship and involving people in service delivery. The recent white paper on local government cites PB as an example of innovative practice giving local people more say in running local services.

5.3 Choice

5.3.1 Supporting Service Users to Access Choice – Much of the literature on offering choice in public services looks at the pre conditions that must exist to enable service users to access choice, or "*building an enabling infrastructure*"⁸ A key aspect of this, as identified in the above report is "*access to independent advice and advocacy services for people who need expert support in order to exercise choice*". This is also vital in order to address equity issues that offering choice may give.

NHS Patient Choice

Giving patients more choice about how, when and where they receive treatment is one cornerstone of the Government's health strategy. Another is giving members of the public a bigger hand in shaping local care systems. In December 2003, the Department for Health published a strategy paper, Building on the Best: Choice, Responsiveness and Equity in the NHS. This document broadly sets out how the Government will make NHS services more responsive to patients, by offering more choice across the spectrum of healthcare. Its main aim is to improve patient and user experience and build new partnerships between those who use health and social care and those who work in them.

PCTs are gradually building on the choice agenda and more and more patients are being offered choice in the treatment available to them. For instance, if following consultation with your GP you require further specialist treatment you will be offered a choice of 4 local hospitals or clinics for treatment.

Information, and resources to support patients being able to access that information is essential to Choice in the NHS. Giving public and patients good information not only enables them to understand their health requirements but also helps them to make effective choices that are right for them and their families. Information is essential for people making choices about their care. We are creating new ways to make information relevant, trustworthy and timely for everybody, so that in the future everybody has the right to choose.

The NHS is hoping the choice agenda will drive future hospital spending, by ensuring that those hospitals that people want to access health care receive applicable funding, allowing market forces to apply to the NHS. It is further supported by a range of policies and initiatives to modernise the NHS to emphasise the importance of the patient in the design and delivery of services

⁸ *Choice in Public Services*, Audit Commission, September 2004.

5.3.2 **Choice in Customer Access** – Influenced by other sectors, most notably the different access routes available to the consumer in parts of the private sector, and also through the implementation and advances in the “e-government” agenda, there is a gradual widening of the choice of channels available to users to access local authority services. Many local authorities are now competing with both the public and private sector, and embracing new technologies to offer improved customer services.

Improving Customer Service: London Borough of Lewisham

Lewisham’s consultation strategy uses a wide range of methods and techniques to ensure that integrated and accessible services are designed to meet customer needs and uses customer satisfaction as a key measure of the success of its customer service approach. The implementation of one stop shops, contact centres, e-skills and partnership working has enabled the council to use its knowledge of customer needs to better facilitate customer access to a wide range of services and increase customer satisfaction with the council. Lewisham’s AccessPoint one stop service brings together over 40 services into one central location.

The council was awarded Beacon Status in 2001/02 for accessible services. The Beacons advisory panel concluded that LB Lewisham takes a holistic view of their customers’ needs through effective and regular consultation and this was reflected in the provision of customer access.

5.4 Co-Production

5.4.1 *“By putting users at the heart of services, enabling them to become participants in the design and delivery, services will be more effective by mobilising millions of people as co-producers of the public good.”⁹* Leadbetter argues that co-production, or personalisation, should go much further than providing better access and limited say for users in how services are provided in largely traditional ways. He argues that giving users a far greater role, and greater responsibility, to be not just consumers but co-designers and co-producers, leads not only to a rise in service standards, but also sustained innovation in service delivery, and self organisation, or *“the public good emerging from within society...our biggest social challenges ... be(ing) met by mass social innovation within society”¹⁰*

5.4.2 Using the example of the impact of the middle classes quitting smoking in the 1970’s and 80’s and a corresponding decrease in heart disease, Leadbetter argues that people are co-producers of the public good, alongside health professionals and medical advances. Other notable examples of this trend are where service users are empowered to use their own knowledge to provide for themselves, and in certain cases,

⁹ *Personalisation through Participation: A New Script for Public Services*, Charles Leadbetter, Demos, 2004.

¹⁰ *Personalisation through Participation: A New Script for Public Services*, Charles Leadbetter, Demos, 2004.

advise others (e.g. Expert Patients in the health sector), and where local or neighbourhood/grassroots organisation has produced sustained improvements to quality of life and or service improvement through self-initiated action, either separate from or in co-operation with public bodies. He demonstrates that results have been further improved when local authorities or other public bodies have provided the conditions to allow these initiatives to develop.

- 5.4.3 The idea of empowered service users, or citizens is further developed in the recent Prime Minister's Policy Review Paper "*empowered citizens expect and have a right to public services that are responsive to their needs and preferences. But many of the outcomes sought from public services require changes in individual behaviours: better health requires healthier lifestyles; improved education and attainment requires greater parental engagement. So alongside rights come responsibilities, for which the state needs to put in place an appropriate framework.*"¹¹

Self Managed Sports Facilities – Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

Responsibility for running out door leisure facilities has been handed over to users, and sports clubs, in a successful self management initiative in Bury. Funded through the Liveability Fund, the scheme enables sports clubs and allotment associations to take over the running and maintenance of sports clubs, facilities and allotments. Each site has its own particular circumstances, such as the ability to raise income, the condition of facilities, different members' views about self-management, the need for education on forming constituted associations and managing facilities. In some cases, self-management has been set up on a pilot basis and final terms established once the club is confident in its new role.

The popularity of the scheme is self-evident - running their own affairs are: 59 out of 63 senior sports pitches and all mini soccer pitches, 418 out of 507 allotment plots, 13 out of 25 bowling greens, 16 fishing waters, an outdoor activity centre, and activities such as athletics, croquet, cycle speedway, model boating, model car racing, field archery and model aircraft.

The council believes the major project success is the sense of ownership and pride that has developed in the clubs. In addition, facilities have seen better maintenance and reduced vandalism, an increase in help from volunteers, improved partnership working with local community groups, and an increase in external funding; often match funding for Liveability Fund grants to improve facilities.

Both the council and the clubs have seen cost savings in administration and officer time. Cultural Services CPA inspectors gave the scheme the thumbs up, commenting that it enabled "a good quality of experience to be maintained". The result is the long term sustainability of high quality local community facilities.

¹¹ Building on progress: Public Services. Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Policy Review. March 2007

5.4.4 Volunteering and Service Delivery – A specific type of co-production is the direct involvement of service users in delivering services as volunteers supporting existing agencies. In Tower Hamlets an example is our Enviro Volunteers, individuals who have volunteered to support the Council and its contractors in promoting an improved local environment. The involvement of service users in the delivery of these services can increase the resources available to deliver a service and also build social capacity and sustainability through creating more ownership and pride in a local area. For example, Neighbourhood Watch schemes illustrate local people taking ownership of a community issue.

Manchester City Council – “The 100 Days Campaign”

The 100 days' campaign is a Manchester City Council initiative to encourage local people to help make their area a better place to live in. With 'community clean-ups' taking place across the city, the campaign uses publicity effectively to motivate the city's residents and get them involved in the improvement of their physical environment. The environmental campaigns team came up with '100 days to a clean city', which involved 'community clean-ups' with local participation on an unprecedented scale. Publicity was an important element to getting people on board, and included creative stunts such as the executive member for direct services eating his breakfast off a plate in the road to show how clean it was. The 100 days campaign saw more than 6,000 volunteers and more than 10,000 people across all sectors getting involved.

5.4.5 Third Sector Involvement – The role of the third sector in public sector service delivery is being increasingly explored by government. In the December 2006 interim Third Sector Involvement Report (part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review); the Cabinet Office aimed to give an increasing role to the third sector in the transformation of public services “The Government wants to ensure that the third sector is at the heart of reforms to improve public services as contractors delivering public services, as campaigners for change, as advisers influencing the design of services and as innovators from which the public sector can learn. This will require a new approach to commissioning and procurement embracing the sector's multiple roles in shaping and delivering services and particularly in working with users to ensure that services meet their needs”¹²

5.4.5 Whilst not direct co-production, voluntary and community sector involvement in decision making and delivery can bring some of the benefits. Third sector organisations often have close links to the community, or specific parts of the community, and can provide greater insight into their needs and facilitate engagement and trust by local communities and residents. It also has a great potential to be flexible

¹² The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration: Interim Report. December 2006. Cabinet Office / HM Treasury.

and innovate and offer joined up services. Local authorities need to engage third sector organisations at service planning stage to ensure they are full and equal partners in service delivery. They may also need to build capacity

6. Emerging Findings from review of activity in Tower Hamlets

6.1 This section examines the findings of the initial review work undertaken including findings and lessons learned. As part of this exercise we sought to identify a wide range of examples of User Voice, Choice and Co-Production already in existence within the Council and Partnership..

6.2 Voice throughout the Tower Hamlets Partnership

6.2.1 Across the organisation and partner agencies we found many examples of user voice. These fell into six main categories:

- **User forums with service users/client groups**, particularly for the more personally consumed services; examples of this include the Catering Forum recently established in Older People's Services and providing a communication link between Day Care Centre Users and Catering staff. There are other examples across Adult's Services and Children's Services of services directly engaging with service users
- **Structured frameworks**, through the Local Strategic Partnership there are well established Local Area Partnership (LAP) Steering Groups. These groups offer a structured and formal framework for residents to feedback to service providers and local decision makers regarding "local" issues and to identify areas for local action.
- **Public consultation events**, there are many examples of large scale public consultation events, many organised through the LAPs, encouraging wider participation across specific issues.
- **Engagement activity around specific policies/ developments**, There are many examples across the partnership of services consulting with service users, and residents regarding particular services, schemes, capital works and initiatives. The widespread consultation around the Local Development Framework can again be included here, as can York Hall refurbishment, and the 2007 Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Award winning Women into Public Life Campaign.
- **Regular customer feedback**, there are examples of high level borough wide surveys, including the Annual Residents' Survey, Residents' Panel consultations, the results of which can be evidenced to influence service provision. In addition, there are opportunities for recipients of services to provide specific feedback, for example an ongoing process of monitoring tenant satisfaction after a repair has been carried out to their home.
- **User Involvement in service planning**, there is initial work taking place involving service users in service and team planning, particularly within Children's Services and Adult's Services. The User Involvement team within the Leaving Care Service can demonstrate service users actively participating in setting the team's work programme. Initiatives within Community Safety, such as the Better Tower Hamlets Teams and Safer Neighbourhoods Teams, also

demonstrate direct resident involvement in priority and target setting, through the Local Area Partnerships.

- 6.2.2 There were also good examples of voice activities engaging with a wide range of service users, particularly innovative work with young people, well established partnership boards for older people, disabled people and people with learning disabilities, specific initiatives targeted at BME communities and under-represented groups, and use of the 3rd sector to access different groups. A particular example was the Women into Public Life project which sought not to encourage local women to engage in a range of opportunities for public. It was also noted that some voice work bordered on co-production, for example young people being involved in the re-design of Child Protection reviews.
- 6.2.3 It was also noted that the Consultation and Involvement (C&I) Framework and a Consultation Calendar have helped to facilitate good practice across the Partnership through sharing plans for and results of consultation across the Partnership to minimise duplication and share good practice. As a relatively new initiative, there are opportunities to ensure that awareness of the Calendar is raised and more widespread use made of it.

Voice Case Study – Catering Forum, Older People.

The forum was recently set up as a channel of communication between the borough's kitchen and residents who receive meals on wheels. Currently the forum has representatives from all 4 of the borough's day centres for older people, including Russia Lane Day Centre, for people with dementia. The representatives take comments from people who attend the centres regarding the quality of meals and choice in menus. They then raise issues with the kitchen manager.

The purpose of the group is to improve the quality and the standard of the food delivered. A key driver is to reduce the amount of food which is thrown away and to establish why the food is thrown away. The kitchen manager then makes what changes she can (within budget) to the food and menus.

The forum has only recently been set up; therefore it is difficult at this stage to measure improvements against targets. However, at this time, costs are negligible; also any improvements to menus and food quality should be cost neutral due to a reduction in food wastage. The aim of the forum is to use service user feedback to improve the service using the same resources; this should be achieved through reducing the amount of food which is thrown away.

At the moment the group is still setting its key outcomes, and work is ongoing to ensure that service users are involved in setting these key targets. However, key drivers for the project are the reduction of food wastage and increases in user satisfaction. Also, whilst it may be difficult to establish direct causal relationships between food consumed and overall health and well being, evidence suggests that people are healthier, and the progress of dementia slowed when they consume a balanced diet.

Overall outcomes of the forum for service users will be better quality food, and more influence over menus. User views will be measured via before and after satisfaction surveys. Managers also recognise that they need to further encourage feedback via comments forms and ensure forum representatives are supported and feel properly empowered to represent Day Care Centre User views. It is recognised that it will take time to build this sort of capacity.

6.3 Choice throughout the Tower Hamlets Partnership

6.3.1 Across the partnership there are a number of specific examples of user choice in service delivery, but these are less prevalent than examples of user voice. Specific examples included Choice Based Lettings, Direct Payments, and Choice of Hospital.

6.3.2 Many examples of choice are also coupled with high quality information and support. For example, within Choice of secondary care within hospitals, high levels of resource are spent promoting the scheme and ensuring that patients can make an informed choice. Choice Based Lettings similarly resource support for users and ensure the information that they provide is high quality and easily accessible.

6.3.3 Choice is also a key theme of the Customer Access Strategy, and many services offer choice to residents and service users in terms of how they can access or engage in dialogue with services.

Choice Case Study – Choice Based Lettings

Choice Based Lettings manages the letting of all properties in the borough that become void. The system, introduced through the 2000 government green paper "Quality and Choice - A Decent Home For All", aims to increase transparency in the letting of social homes and was seen as a way of creating sustainable communities, by giving people choice in where they opted to live.

All void properties in the borough are advertised weekly in East End Life, the Lettings brochure and on the internet. The brochure is left at all key access points (e.g. one stop shops). People can then bid for available properties, there is no limit on how many bids people can make and they can bid either via the internet, by telephone or by using a coupon. Housing is then allocated based on need, need is assessed based on registration data on the housing list, emergencies, medical need and under and over occupancy. Households containing people over 60 or under 10 are also given increased priority.

On average 35-40 properties are advertised per week, and each of these will receive approximately 300 bids. Vulnerable applicants are assisted in making bids and there is also an automated bidding system, by which vulnerable applicants automatically bid for a property if one suitable to their needs becomes void.

A key feature of Tower Hamlets Choice Based lettings scheme is the work to ensure information is accessible to all. The Choice Based Lettings team see a key part of their role is to enable people to act for themselves and make the best possible choices through accessibility of information. This is further supported by the variety of ways people can make bids, using both telephony systems and e-communication to better enable this, along with written coupons. The use of community language in advertising material and phone bidding system increases accessibility of information, as does the use of symbols telling people about individual properties. The Choice Based Letting team also includes a client support team to support vulnerable applicants to make their bids.

Key indicators within the service have shown a corresponding improvement since the introduction of choice based lettings, particularly void property turn around time, and reducing refusal rates. There had also been improvements in terms of over crowding and under occupancy rates. It must be noted however that there have been other changes within Housing Services in this time period. Also it is still too early to judge the impact of Choice Based Lettings on sustainable communities; lengths of tenancies pre and post introduction have not yet been compared.

Satisfaction of service users is continually assessed by the service. Whilst it needs to be remembered that letting homes is an extremely emotive service, and within the borough demand exceeds supply for homes, overall satisfaction is improving with the service. A recent satisfaction survey, looking at how people found both the process and their new homes, revealed 45% of people were satisfied with the process. Other key indicators, reveal that complaints have fallen since the introduction of Choice Based Lettings.

Combined with new IT systems, there is evidence that Choice Based Lettings has increased efficiencies and improved services delivered to service users.

6.4 Co-production throughout the Tower Hamlets Partnership

- 6.4.1 The review found there were many examples of services users being engaged to help better deliver a wide range of services. Some services however, seemed to have developed more clearly defined co-production arrangements. For example Children's Services had many examples of children being involved in the provision of services, the Leaving Care team being a key example.
- 6.4.2 There were also a number of examples of volunteering as a form of co-production, for example, Environment Volunteers. As part of its Local Area Agreement, the Partnership has set clear targets for further increasing levels of volunteering and the voluntary sector is leading on delivering these. The review has also identified examples of co-production in which service users are "experts" involved in sharing knowledge and skills, and championing causes, for example, Expert Patients and Arts Ambassadors.
- 6.4.3 Co-Production is also represented by third sector involvement in service delivery. In many cases, as third sector organisations are often closer to or run by service users, they do involve users and citizens more directly in joint delivery. There are a number of examples of this, particularly within Social Services and Environmental Services.

Co-Production Case Study – Leaving Care Team

The Leaving Care Service (LCS) aims to assist young people in the council's care prepare for their independence and to provide support to young people leaving care as they establish themselves living independently. The service works closely with young people, their carers and social workers and aims to help young people to pursue education or training, obtain employment and suitable housing.

The LCS has a highly developed User Involvement service, recognising that a service for young people needs to be specifically targeted and accessible, and that there are increased service benefits of having an active service user voice, in terms of feedback and development of services to better respond to the needs and aspirations of users.

For the last 8-9 years the User Involvement Team consists of two trainees within the LCS. Former service users, the trainees are supported in achieving an NVQ (usually levels 3-4 in Health and Social Care, Management or Advice and Guidance). The trainees principal role is to support and facilitate user involvement within the service. The User Involvement officers are full members of the team and sit on all management meetings, they help to develop and shape the service on an on-going basis.

They facilitate User Involvement through a range of activities; production of a quarterly magazine (with service users), activities including a BBQ, end of year events, sessional work, interview and skills residential (young people getting training to be on the recruitment and selection panels of staff). For many of these activities the User Involvement officers are facilitating and organising young people to produce the outcomes. Service users also have an active role in setting the work programme of the User Involvement team.

The scheme is highly regarded at a national level, including achieving Charter Mark in 2005. Many Leaving Care teams from across the country wish to visit the service to learn from it. The User Involvement service has also been singled out by the Commission for Social Care Inspection for praise.

The User Involvement team bring "Added Value" to the services offered by LCS and give young people an opportunity to be directly involved in improving the services that they receive. There is also the opportunity for involvement in taking part in, organising and delivering activities, giving transferable skills.

Satisfaction of young people with the user involvement team is regularly measured, and is usually high. Young people appreciate the social sessions, but are especially keen to be involved in steering group meetings and setting work priorities for the team. Attendance figures

6.5 Improving Information

6.5.1 In order to exercise voice, choice and become involved in co-production residents will increasingly demand better and more accessible performance information to hold service providers to account. To explore the requirements further a number of resident focus groups were held in different areas of the borough with a representative set of invitees drawn from the Residents' Panel. They were consulted on:

- The type of performance information they would like to be provided with; and
- The most useful format for this information to be provided in.

6.5.2 The following key points emerged from the consultation:

- Residents prefer more focus on “outcome” indicators, rather than “perception” indicators;
- Indicators need to be statistically meaningful and easily understood, and to give comparable information where available (e.g. national & borough statistics), and information is broken down, e.g. ward level, ethnicity where possible.
- When reporting information, give context, e.g. activities under taken to achieve these results, and explanations where impact was not what was expected. As part of this costs should be included.
- Layout is important, information should be well presented and easy to understand, the use of symbols where appropriate is popular. However, if too “professional”, people are suspicious of cost.
- Dependent on costs, information should be delivered to homes as an insert with East End Life, rather than a feature, this makes it more likely it will be read and believed. It should also be available in community places, e.g. libraries, health centres, schools, mosques, etc.
- Use of bus stops, buses and IT (e.g. email) to communicate this information had mixed support, and was felt to be dependent on costs not being excessive. People are also mistrustful of over reliance on simple statements and statistics.
- Performance information should be provided with Council Tax information so people can see what their money is being spent on.

7 Emerging Principles

7.1 One of the aims of this review was to develop a set of key principles to guide the Tower Hamlets Partnership and key service providers to ensure that we maximise opportunities for voice, choice and co-production across all our work. Attendees at the Strategy Challenge Workshop reviewed and challenged the findings to date, as well as national best practice, and helped to develop an initial set of principles. The principles seek to establish the type of service that are most appropriate to deliver the particular approach; action necessary to engage different service users; and ensuring that both equity and efficiency are maximised.

7.2 Voice

The following principles for the greater deployment of User Voice have been identified:

- All services should provide good quality information to their service users and consult with them about design and delivery of services;
- Each directorate should consider through team and service planning voice and user engagement, e.g. how they provide access to service, on what service areas they will consult and how they will consult etc. Service planning guidance will be update to reflect this
- Consultation should be proportionate to an issue and be realistic in terms of clarity with local residents about any constraints and what they can and cannot influence.
- All Voice initiatives should commit to consultation good practice principles, for example, ensuring feedback of the results of consultation exercise, and should ensure they can manage increased expectations that consultation may bring.
- Equity is achieved through seeking to ensuring balanced representation in surveys and focus groups and through using targeted information campaigns or dedicated approaches targeted at under represented or hard to reach groups.
- More use could be made of customer segmentation and social marketing techniques to more scientifically target particular communities and groups with information and opportunities to participate.
- Increased, Partnership wide use should be made of the Consultation Calendar.¹³This should lead to efficiencies through avoiding duplicating consultations and achieving better quality consultation. Best practice guidance should also be provided by the Consultation and Involvement team.
- User voice can improve cost effectiveness, by channelling resources more effectively into activities and services that meet the needs of service users. For example, providing clients with greater influence about the content and quality of meals on wheels has increased take-up and reduced wastage. However, there are costs involved with providing Voice opportunities, particularly when engaging hard to reach groups. Voice opportunities should therefore be effective in influencing and improving services. It is important to ensure voice opportunities are linked to the costs of providing them.

7.3 The following Choice principles have been identified:

- All services should seek to offer choice in terms of methods of customer access, e.g. phone/web/in person; and opening hours.
- It is not applicable that all services offer choice about delivery mechanisms, for example universal or communal services, e.g. Refuse and Street Cleaning provision, where there may be

¹³<http://thhome.towerhamlets.gov.uk/LBTHIntranet/Directorates/ChiefExecutives/Consultation/Products/Calendar+Homepage.htm>

significant value for money and equity implications of differential service approaches. Residents tell us they want an efficient and effective service in this area rather than choice of provider.

- All services should ensure choice is reflected in their team and directorate plan. Following consultation with users and outline within the plan what choice they will offer and what they will achieve through offering choice.
- Choice should be, and in many cases is, offered to individuals receiving personal services, e.g. aspects of social care and housing. There are constraints to choice as a result of limited supply. In choice-based lettings for example, applicants only have a choice of property to the extent that such property becomes available and their level of need enables them to compete with other applicants. This to some extent mirrors the market where choice depends on supply and cost.
- Choice could be further expanded and become appropriate for communal services, if it was offered on a communal locality basis rather than individual basis, e.g. LAPs commissioning services such as street cleaning. Such approaches do raise issues about value for money and ensuring equity of service levels. This might be an area for a small pilot.
- In order to ensure fairness of public sector provision, detailed planning is required and safeguards necessary, such as, high levels of information and support to accompany choice to ensure those offered choice can get the most out of it, particularly vulnerable service users. Workshop participants from the health service stressed the extent of personal support that is needed to make hospital choice policies effective and meaningful.
- The extent and nature of support to make choice effective is likely to be much greater for vulnerable groups, young people and those who have fewer language or literacy skills.
- There is need for further evidence to assess whether the costs of ensuring high quality information and support to facilitate choice can be offset by efficiency savings. Such savings might come through a reduction in the requirement to maintain bureaucratic administrative systems to allocate services which are now allocated via choice or, in classic market terms, because individual choice more effectively allocates goods or services in limited supply. It is hoped that the case study into choice-based lettings may provide some evidence of this. However, it is important to link the choices to the costs of providing them.

7.4 The following Co-Production principles have been identified:

- All services should consider Co-Production within the development of the team and directorate plan, and outline their plans for moving towards greater co-production.
- Whilst it is not applicable for all services to offer co-production to its full extent, many services could offer aspects of co-

production, building on voice opportunities, particularly in the planning, design and monitoring of service delivery.

- Maximising co-production is particularly important in terms of achieving outcomes which require changing behaviours and attitudes. Whilst it was felt that resident compliance with statutory requirements (e.g. payment of council tax) was not really an example of co-production, there are other areas where compliance (e.g. recycling household waste, not dumping litter) does begin to touch on co-production, particularly when residents are engaged and encouraged to promote good behaviours amongst others in their community. There are opportunities to consider incentives or enforcement to encourage greater co-production.
- Residents volunteering directly to support service provision and/or behaviour change is a form of co-production. There is a need for more Partnership-wide engagement with initiatives to maximise volunteering to ensure we hit our LAA targets.
- The benefits to both services and individuals need to be clear at the offset, i.e. incentives to individual service users.
- In order to maximise the involvement of service users in the delivery of services, consultation exercises should begin early on. Good quality co-production of service delivery, with third sector organisations and individuals, is dependent on good consultation in terms of the design of services, which also builds confidence and trust between traditional providers and co-producees.
- Co-production has the potential for positive impacts on service users, including increased social capacity and transferable skills. Different approaches may be needed to ensure that the more vulnerable are able to access these opportunities. Techniques such as Equalities Impact Assessments should be used when co-production initiatives are introduced to ensure that access is as widely available as possible.
- Observation and anecdotal evidence would indicate that greater co-production can increase value for money through harnessing new resources, skills and expertise to supplement professional provision. However, there is limited systematic analysis of costs and benefits. In order to ensure value for money is achieved, co-production initiatives need to set clear outcome and efficiency targets from the start and monitor their achievement. It is recognised that some of these benefits, for example those relating to “softer” areas such as social capacity, may be more difficult to measure.

8 Key Areas for Improvement

- 8.1 The activities undertaken as part of this review, including; wide ranging consultation with service managers and partner agencies; best practice research of other authorities and organisations; research into theory and current thinking; challenge discussions with senior officers, members and other representatives from across the partnership; and

discussions with service users and residents have led to the development of our emerging principles and also a number key areas for improvement.

8.2 The key areas for improvement identified have been developed into a Improvement Plan, attached as **Appendix A**. The Improvement Plan also includes suggested governance arrangements to ensure the delivery of the Improvement Plan. It is suggested that the current project steering group acts as a monitoring group to ensure implementation of the plan.

8.3 **Enabling Residents to hold us to account**

- For 06/07 publish the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) summary and Annual Report in current format and via the website, but with additional requests for feedback regarding format and information included. Also increase efforts to ensure local people are aware of the Reports and where to find them via east End Life and other outlets.
- For 07/08 review the content and format of the BVPP summary and Annual Report to ensure they are better linked to resident requirements.
- Report back annually to each Local Area Partnership on 10-15 selected indicators reflecting local priorities and key Community Plan and LAA indicators, with comparisons to borough and London averages.
- Produce a 6 month borough wide performance update by the end of November each year.
- Produce guidance for service providers to enable them to report back to residents and service users on key performance information and how they should enable feedback on what information and how that information is delivered.

8.4 **Building on and embedding user focus across the Partnership**

- Review the role of the Consultation & Involvement (C&I) team to further consolidate their move to the Partnership Support Team and to embed user involvement good practice across the Partnership, including increasing awareness of the support available from the C&I team.
- Refresh and relaunch the Consultation and Involvement Framework to ensure service providers have access to user focus, choice and user involvement guidance. Relaunch should include increased referral of the Consultation and Involvement Framework in the Community Plan and it should be presented to CPAGs, LAP Steering Groups and user forums.
- Increase mechanisms to ensure good practice is shared across the Partnership. Use of the Consultation Calendar should be encouraged.
- Ensure principles developed and guidance to enable service providers to increase user voice, choice and co-production are

embedded within service planning and team planning guidance, and consistency is achieved across the Partnership.

8.5 Further develop Partnership approach to choice & co-production

- Produce and promote guidance for Council and Partnership services based on Case Studies and examples identified in this review.
- Use the opportunity of the planned major public and community consultation during 2007/08 to develop a new Community Plan to further explore residents' expectations and preferences around greater choice and service involvement
- Encourage each Council Directorate and Partnership agency to develop 1-2 new services/initiatives or use existing or planned initiatives to trial greater choice or co-production. Ensure that clear targets around the impact on outcomes and value for money are set and monitored to increase and disseminate the lessons learned. Ensure that each initiative is subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.
- Ensure mechanisms are in place to measure and monitor benefits to demonstrate impact on improvement and efficiency, including key outputs and value for money.

8.6 Improving choice in Customer Access

- Implement the recommendations from the Choice Based Customer Access Strategy (developed by June 2007). The strategy is in the process of being developed, however it is working toward the following vision; *"Customers will choose how and when to access our services. We will aim to deal with their enquiry at the first point of contact. Customers will deal with proactive, knowledgeable customer focussed staff empowered to put the customer first at all times."*

9 Next Steps and recommendations

- 9.1 Once revised following CMT input and agreed by Cabinet, the Improvement Plan will be implemented through the Council's project management arrangements. Sara Williams will be the Director level Project Sponsor and regular updates will be made to her and an appropriate body which acts as the Project Board. Progress on implementation will be reported to CMT and to the Members' Performance and Improvement Group.

10. Next Steps

- 10.1 We are currently consulting on the initially identified Principles and Improvement Areas, prior to the development of a Final Report and Improvement Plan. These will be submitted to Cabinet in June 2007.
- 10.2 We would appreciate any comments you have on the review, principles emerging and the Improvement Areas and possible actions.

Appendix B

User Voice, Choice and Co-Production: Improvement Plan April 2007

Improvement Area		1. Enabling Residents to hold us to account		
Ref	Activity	Milestones	Lead	Resources
1.1	Publish the 2006/7 Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) summary and Annual Report with additional requests for feedback regarding format and content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BVPP Annual Summary completed March 2007 Full Annual report by June 2007 	Performance Manager	Within existing budget
1.2	Summary to be made available in libraries, one stop shops and other community outlets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mail out to key organisations by end April 2007 	Performance Manager	<i>Being costed (completed April 2007)</i>
1.3	Review the content and format of the 2007/08 BVPP summary, incorporating comments received for 2006/07 BVPP Reports & User Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New format & content developed January 2008 Sign Off (Content and Format) CMT / Cabinet January 2008 New Annual Report by June 2008 	Performance Manager	Within existing budget
1.4	Summary to be made available in libraries, one stop shops and other community outlets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mail out to key organisations by end April 2008 	Performance Manager	<i>Being costed (completed April 2007)</i>
1.5	Report Annually to each Local Area Partnership on 10-15 selected indicators reflecting local priorities and key Community Plan and LAA indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with LAPs / Ward councillors', develop content and format – July 2007 CMT / PMG Agree format – Sept 2007 Publish & Disseminate – Jan 2008 	Performance Manager / Partnership Director	<i>Being costed (completed June 2007)</i>
1.6	Develop a 6 month borough wide performance update by the end of November each year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop content and format (incorporating comments received BVPP reporting)– July 	Performance Manager	<i>Being costed (completed June 2007)</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 CMT / Member Agree Format - Sept 2007 Publish & Disseminate Dec 2007 		
1.7	Provide guidance for Service Providers regarding Performance Reporting based on learning from consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance developed and disseminated – July 2007 	Performance Manager	Within existing (S&P) resources

All Performance Reporting including re-development of the BVPP summary, LAP Annual Report cards, and 6 Month Borough wide performance update should be developed together to ensure efficiencies, e.g. no overlap of consultation, but also to ensure consistency and a corporate brand.

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Improvement Area		2. Building on and Embedding User Focus across the Partnership		
Ref	Activity	Milestones	Lead	Resources
2.1	Role and remit of the C&I team to be developed following move to Partnership structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action Plan developed May 2007 	Consultation & Involvement Manager and Head of Participation and Engagement	Within existing resources
2.2	Refresh and relaunch the Consultation and Involvement Framework to reflect the principles developed through this review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framework refreshed June 2007 Presented to CPAGs, LAP steering groups and other forums June 2007 Launched across Partnership July 2007 	Consultation & Involvement Manager and Head of Participation and Engagement	Within existing resources
2.3	Refresh and relaunch the Consultation & Involvement toolkit to reflect the learning from this review, and greater focus on choice and co-production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sept 2007 	Consultation & Involvement Manager	Within existing resources
2.4	Further develop the Consultation Calendar as a mechanism for sharing good practice across the Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sept 2007 (Actions & Milestones to be further developed) 	Consultation & Involvement Manager	Within existing resources

Improvement Area		3. Further develop partnership approach to choice and co-production		
Ref	Activity	Milestones	Lead	Resources
3.1	Update team and service planning guidance to ensure user voice, choice and co-production opportunities are addressed at service planning stage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated Team and Directorate Planning guidance launched – January 2008 	Performance Manager	Within existing resources
3.1	Use the planned major public and community consultation during 2007/08 to develop a new Community Plan to consult with residents' regarding greater choice and service involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBC – Plan for refresh of CP developed by May 2007. 	Consultation & Involvement Manager / Head of Participation and Involvement	Within existing resources
3.2	Identify 1-2 new or planned initiatives to trial greater choice or co-production in each council directorate, and in Partnership agencies where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> June 2007 (dependent on initiatives) 	Directorates - Co-ordinated via Performance Manager	Within existing resources
3.3	Develop project plans, identifying aims and key outputs, including efficiency and “added value” outputs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Plans & Outcomes developed – July 2007 Implement from Sept 07 	Directorates - Co-ordinated via Performance Manager	Within existing resources
3.4	Evaluate and report on learning, benefits and efficiencies from new initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review by Mar 08 	Directorates - Co-ordinated via Performance Manager	Within existing resources
3.5	Publicise findings of trials across Partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 2008 	Performance Manager/Consultation & Involvement Manager	Within existing resources

Improvement Area		4. Improving Choice in Customer Access		
Ref	Activity	Milestones	Lead	Resources
4.1	Finalise and implement recommendations from the Choice Based Customer Access Strategy (developed by June 2007).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy & Action Plan Developed June Delivery Plan & monitoring arrangements to be agreed 	Head of Customer Access	Within existing resources.

Improvement Area		5. Project Management Arrangements		
Ref	Activity	Milestones	Lead	Resources
5.1	Project team, including project sponsor, lead and monitoring arrangements agreed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 2007 	Steering Group	Within existing resources
5.2	Detailed project plan developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 2007 	Steering Group	Within existing resources
5.3	Progress on Improvement Plan monitored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CMT – Oct 2007 - Mar 2008 MPIG – Oct 2007 - Mar 2008 	Steering Group	Within existing resources

Agenda Item 9.1

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 May 2007	Unrestricted		
Report of: Sara Williams Assistant Chief Executive		Title: Report of the Leaseholders and Customer Care Scrutiny Working Group		
Originating Officer(s): Alan Steward Scrutiny Policy Manager		Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Leaseholders and Customer Care Scrutiny Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Endorse the draft report of the Leaseholders and Customer Care Scrutiny Working Group
- 2.2 The Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree the final report before its submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for Excellent Public Services.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

Scrutiny Review File held in Scrutiny Policy Team

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

Alan Steward
020 7364 44873

3. Background

- 3.1 The Working Group was established in October 2006 to investigate the customer care of leaseholders in the borough.
- 3.2 The working group met six times including a number of meetings with the Housing Service to consider the various services offered to leaseholders and initiatives to improve them. They also met with representatives from Tower Hamlets Leaseholders Association and held two focus groups with leaseholders to find out about the customer experience and other issues. Finally the Scrutiny Lead visited Westminster Council's Leaseholders Service to conduct a benchmark study.
- 3.3 The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Once agreed, the working group's recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet for a response to their recommendations.

4. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Any legal considerations arising from the resultant Action Plan will be addressed at that point

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. Equal Opportunity Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct equal opportunity implications arising from this report.

7. Anti-Poverty Implications

- 7.1 The report considers the financial impact of service charges and major works and suggests further options for offering financial support to some leaseholders.

8. Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

- 8.1 There are no direct actions for a greener environment arising from the report.

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the Working Group's report or recommendations.

**Leaseholders:
A Case Study of Customer Care**

Tower Hamlets Council
May 2007



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Acknowledgements

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Working Group members:

Councillor Stephanie Eaton (Liberal Democrat)

Councillor Marc Francis (Labour)

Councillor Bill Turner (Labour)

Councillor Alex Heslop (Labour)

Councillor Waiseul Islam (Respect)

Other Councillors

Councillor Tim Archer (Conservative)

Councillor Louise Alexander (Liberal Democrat)

Housing

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Natalie Errington, Scrutiny Policy Officer

The Working Group would like to thank all the leaseholders that participated through the questionnaires and focus groups. They would also like to thank Tower Hamlets Leaseholders Association and City West Homes for their valuable contributions.

Chair's Foreword

I am delighted to present the scrutiny report into the review of leaseholders: a case study in customer care.

In conducting this scrutiny review, I set out with four ambitions. Firstly, that it should be genuinely non-partisan in its spirit. Secondly, that it should engage fully with leaseholders across the borough. Thirdly, that we should highlight the good things the Council is doing to improve leaseholder services whilst not shirking the responsibility of identifying those for improvements. Finally, that we should not try and fix the world in the review, but focus in on the crucial things that need to be done to improve leaseholder services and customer care in the borough.

In presenting this report, I am confident that we have achieved each of these ambitions.

Leaseholders now represent a significant and growing proportion of the residents who use Council Housing Services. Leaseholder issues also represent a significant and growing proportion of the casework that councillors receive. The issue of leaseholder service charges and major works bills have been a source of controversy in the borough of the last few years. It is for this reason that I felt a scrutiny review, framed against the context of customer care in the Council's service delivery, would be an opportunity to make a positive contribution to the relationship between the Council and leaseholders. It has also been an opportunity to demonstrate to a significant number of residents the role and importance of scrutiny in the Council.

This review has highlighted that there is much to be done to ensure consistent quality of services provided to leaseholders by the Council. More crucially, there is a real need to improve the overall relationship between the Council and leaseholders. This is a collective responsibility on councillors, council officers and leaseholders. Our findings and recommendations clearly highlight that the way forward lies in delivering good quality communications; clear and unambiguous processes for handling complaints and disputes; transparent and high quality data management; and ensuring clear accountability in local service delivery.

I would like to thank all of the Council Officers from Housing and leaseholders from across the borough who have participated in the review. The level of energy and engagement from all of them into this review has been crucial to its success.

I would also like to thank Alan Steward, Natalie Errington and Shanara Martin from the Scrutiny team who have done a first class job in supporting this review.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all of the councillors who participated in this review. This has been an intensive piece of work, with a wealth of evidence provided. The councillors have approached this work in a non-partisan way, focused in on the crucial elements of the evidence and developed a set of recommendations that I believe can build a sustainable platform for improving leaseholder relationships in the borough.

This report lays out some practical steps to improve customer service delivery and start to build a stronger relationship between leaseholders and the Council. I hope that all parties will take the opportunity presented.

Councillor Simon Rouse
Scrutiny Lead, Excellent Public Services

Recommendations

The Working Group recommendations focus on four areas that require consideration and action from Housing. The recommendations are presented as useful starting points for improving the relationship between leaseholders and the Council and providing better customer service.

Communication and Engagement with Leaseholders

- R1 Housing should explore the potential merit of establishing a new borough-wide leaseholder's forum. The Working Group would suggest that any new forum should see a balanced range of representation including: Council officers, Councillors, Leaseholder Representative Bodies. Functions of this forum might include; inter alia,
- User test service charges
 - User test all future communications
 - Measure performance against an agreed set of performance indicators.
 - Review all communications with leaseholders in an effort to reduce the number of complaints and minimise the number of leaseholders withholding payment. This would include more detailed explanation of service charges including the differences and reasons for estimated and actual bills and why leaseholders in the same block may be paying different levels of charge
- R2 Housing should deliver greater transparency on the deliberations and decisions of Due Regard Panels (for Major Works) including giving leaseholder representatives an opportunity to present their case against works to the panel, providing feedback to local leaseholders on the outcomes and reasons for its decisions.
- R3 Housing should implement a key lessee system, seeking maximum estate coverage, similar to the one delivered by City West Homes.
- R4 The key elements of service provision at a local level, such as cleaning, need to be subject to greater independent quality review and that the involvement of leaseholders in estate inspections needs to be enhanced. The Working Group believe the key lessee system would support this.
- R5 Housing should conduct a review of its leaseholder communications, and guidance pack with a view to increasing accessibility and penetration of leaseholders.
- R6 Housing must publish the "apportionment of time" data that informed the Housemark benchmarking exercise. Housing should undertake, in partnership with leaseholders, a review programme focused on improving service charge transparency and data provision.
- R7 Housing should send all leaseholders – and tenants – the caretaking schedule for their block, details of the annual horticultural maintenance programme, and clarify which other blocks are included in the estate cleaning service charge. The Working Group would also encourage Housing to consider including full details of the works covered by the block maintenance charge in the 'Actual'.
- R8 The Working Group welcome the steps being taken to improve staff training and Leaseholder open days. These actions should be maintained and embedded further to improve leaseholder engagement.

- R9 Housing should ensure that it implements and embeds fully all aspects of the Council's Customer Promise, in both process and culture.

The Complaints Procedures and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Scheme

- R10 There is clear evidence that a significant number of leaseholders lack confidence in the current Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme's independence and fairness. The Working Group believe that 3 options should be considered by Housing and Cabinet, following consultation with leaseholders and their representatives:
- i. Relaunch the current ADR scheme. There would need to be clear communication to leaseholders that the system had changed and what the improvements were intended to achieve. This would include:
 - clearer information about the new transparent ADR process including
 - That the ADR is one option and clearly set out the different options, and when each one is most appropriate.
 - Clearer guidelines around the specifics of the process, including the rights and responsibilities of both parties.
 - ii. Disband the ADR process and make all complaints go through the corporate complaints procedure. If this option was taken it would be necessary for an option of arbitration/mediation to take place between stage two and three of the complaints procedure.
 - iii. Develop a new ADR scheme reflecting current industry best practice
- R11 The current relationship between the ADR scheme, the use of a Leaseholder Valuation Tribunal and Corporate Complaints Process is not clear. As a matter of urgency, Housing should, in consultation with key leaseholder groups, provide clear guidance to staff and leaseholders on the role of each process.

Home Ownership Service Structure and Role of Local Housing Offices

- R12 The Working Group would encourage Housing to adopt a model which includes:
- officers within the central team being given geographical patches to provide a more cohesive service
 - Specific Leaseholder Officers within the Local Housing Office, proportionate to the number of leaseholder properties
 - More leaseholder services to be provided at the Local Housing Office.

Advice and Support for Leaseholders in Arrears and for Major Works

- R13 Housing should review the current contract with Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) so that it provides a service that deals specifically with managing the financial issues faced by leaseholders.
- R14 Housing should meet with Tower Hamlets Community Credit Union to explore developing specific support for leaseholders so that they can access affordable loans.
- R15 Housing should provide clear guidance to leaseholders on the law surrounding statute barred debt.

Council-wide recommendations

The review was designed as a case study of the customer care received by people using Council services. As result of the review, the Working Group makes the following general recommendations.

- R16 Communication underpins how the Council deals with local residents. In improving the responsiveness of services , the Council needs to invest further so that communication is clear, accessible and appropriate to services. This is particularly important in explaining the reasons for the way that services are delivered, particularly where individual charges are being raised.
- R17 The Council needs to explore further how it can get closer to customers. For front-line high volume services such as housing, it would seem beneficial to have a strong connection between service providers and localities. This seems to provide the greatest potential to build a strong customer relationship based around both ownership and accountability.
- R18 The Corporate Complaints Process is a crucial part of the Council's delivery of the customer promise. The Council should ensure that its relationship with any other statutory or non-statutory processes that directorates may use is clear to both staff and residents.
- R19 The Customer Promise is a vital statement of the Council's culture and delivery of Excellent Public Services. The Council should develop clearer mechanisms for ensuring both the spirit and content of the Customer Promise are being delivered in Directorates.

Introduction

1. Leaseholder management makes up a significant and increasing proportion of the Council's property portfolio. As of April 2006, the number of leasehold properties owned by Tower Hamlets was 11,091 or 38.6% of the Council's total housing stock compared to 22.7% in April 2000.
2. The Council provides a range of services to leaseholders including the repair and maintenance and general upkeep of all common areas to blocks and estates. This includes caretaking, repairs both routine and major and grass cutting. Leaseholders are charged for these services either through their annual service charge or – for Major Works – separate charges.
3. There have been a number of issues in recent years that have meant that the relationship between the Council and leaseholders has sometimes been difficult. This includes the level of service charges and how they are calculated and consultation and engagement with the Tower Hamlets Leaseholders Association. This is reflected in the volume of enquiries to councillors. Taking account of this, it was felt that a scrutiny review of leaseholders could help highlight not only specific issues but also serve as a case study of the Council's wider customer care. For that reason it was accepted as a Scrutiny Review topic.
4. A Working Group was established in September 2006 to investigate how the Council's model of customer care is being delivered through a study of leaseholders. It was politically balanced and comprised of seven councillors. The Chair of the Working Group was Councillor Simon Rouse, Scrutiny Lead, Excellent Public Services.
5. The Working Group met with Housing on five occasions. The Director of Housing Management and relevant officers providing the Working Group with detailed information and briefings about key aspects of services to leaseholders including:
 - Home Ownership services
 - Service Charges
 - Major Works
 - Local Housing Office services
 - Consultation and engagement
 - Information provide to leaseholders
 - Alternative Dispute Resolution
6. These sessions had four main aims:
 - To develop an understanding of the services currently provided
 - To set out the current structure of the Housing service and proposed changes
 - To highlight recent and planned improvements
 - To set out where further improvements were required
7. The Working Group was keen to learn about the experiences and concerns of leaseholders. To achieve this, four main methods were used.
 - A focus group was held for leaseholders responding to a short article in East End Life promoting the review
 - A questionnaire was also sent to those responding to the article
 - A focus group was held for leaseholders drawn from the Council's Getting Involved Register, including members of the borough-wide Compact
 - A meeting with the Tower Hamlets Leaseholder Association

8. In the recent inspection of City West Homes, the Audit Commission cited the Westminster ALMO (Arms Length Management Organisation) as an example of good practice for leaseholder services, particularly around the management of service charges. The Chair felt it was useful to meet with City West Homes to consider their experience.
9. The review seeks to add value to existing plans for developing leaseholder services and to ensure that the proposed changes reflect and take account of problems identified by leaseholders and where possible reflect good practice in leasehold management elsewhere. The key aim of the Working Group was to make policy recommendations that support service improvement.
10. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the Working Group's report and recommendations. It will then be submitted to Cabinet for a response and action plan.

Findings

11. The Working Group received a wealth of evidence, particularly from Housing, on a wide range of issues. This was extremely useful in providing a detailed knowledge and understanding of leaseholder services. Inevitably not all issues could be considered within the timescale available. The Working Group has prioritised four areas where it was felt there was the greatest concern and scope for improvement. These were:
 - Communication and engagement with leaseholders
 - The complaints procedure and Alternative Dispute Resolution Scheme
 - The structure of the Home Ownership Service and Local Housing Office services
 - The provision of advice and support for leaseholders.

Communication and Engagement with Leaseholders

Consultation and Engagement

12. Improving consultation and communication with leaseholders has been a priority for Housing over the last year. Several new initiatives have been introduced including:
 - Leaseholder open days (programme Nov 06 – Mar 07)
 - A comprehensive Leaseholder information pack
 - A Leaseholder sub-group of the borough-wide Compact
13. These complement a number of existing mechanisms and initiatives including:
 - The borough wide compact group
 - Area residents panels
 - Home Ownership newsletters
 - Tenant and Residents Associations
 - Mystery shopping exercises
 - Resident Involvement Register
14. Housing is also looking to pilot leaseholder surgeries in Local Housing Offices to provide information and help answer any queries about service charges or specific services such as caretaking. This is intended to resolve any concerns at an early stage.

15. Under s20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, the Council must undertake a specific level of consultation on Major Works. This would include significant improvement projects such as re-roofing, window replacement and security works that mean the leaseholder will have to contribute more than £250.
16. The Council's approach exceeds the minimum set down by legislation. All leaseholders are advised in writing of any planned works for the year ahead, their views are sought on the works planned and on potential contractors and then advised once the contractor is appointed and the estimated cost of the works. In addition, on large schemes, as well as advising leaseholders by letter, public meetings or drop-in sessions are held to explain the works being planned. Once a contractor is appointed, there will also be estate meetings to introduce the contractor to residents.
17. Leaseholders have the right to raise any concerns about the extent and quality of the work proposed. When this happens the Council is required to take account of the comments. It does this by holding a 'Due Regard Panel' made up of senior officers within Housing. The Panel considers the comments and the works that are necessary and decides on how best to proceed. Because Major Works usually cover essential works to homes, in most cases the work has gone ahead as planned. The Panel has on some occasions looked to reduce the scope of some of the work following consultation.
18. In discussing consultation with leaseholders, the Working Group was advised of a number of issues.
19. The principle concern raised by Tower Hamlets Leaseholders Association was that there was not a borough-wide consultation forum for leaseholders. This had existed in the past but hadn't met more recently. They felt such a forum was essential to maintain good relationship between the Council and leaseholders.
20. There were also some views that some of the public meetings, such as the Compact group, while providing good discussion with officers about issues, did not seem to result in significant changes or action. It was also felt that decisions concerning leaseholders were taken before they are discussed at the borough-wide Compact and that there should be greater councillor attendance at these meetings. There was also some concern expressed that there was not sufficient advertising of consultation meetings.
21. In considering good practice from other councils, the Working Group heard about City West Homes key lessee system. 97 leaseholders have been recruited to act as advocates for leaseholders covering all areas of Westminster. The key lessee is provided with a full list of repairs and a detailed breakdown of all charges for their block before they are sent out to other leaseholders. This means that the majority of issues can be resolved before the accounts are sent out. The key lessee also acts as an access point for other leaseholders within the block. This helps build the relationships between City West and the leaseholders as they believe they can influence the service from City West.
22. Through Tenant and Resident Associations, Housing has some nominated representatives who undertake estate inspections. This is acknowledged to be patchy however and they are looking to recruit more.

23. The Working Group also heard about other examples of engagement with leaseholders introduced by councils including:
- 1-2-1 service charge surgeries
 - Weekly repairs scrutiny
 - Leaseholder hotline
 - Promoting contact by email
24. The Working Group recognise and welcome the initiatives by Housing to improve consultation and engagement with leaseholders but felt there are a number of areas for further improvement.
25. The Working Group makes the following recommendations.

R1	Housing should explore the potential merit of establishing a new borough-wide leaseholder's forum. The Working Group would suggest that any new forum should see a balanced range of representation including: Council officers, Councillors, Leaseholder Representative Bodies. Functions of this forum might include; interalia, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User test service charges • User test all future communications • Measure performance against an agreed set of performance indicators. • Review all communications with leaseholders in an effort to reduce the number of complaints and minimise the number of leaseholders withholding payment. This would include more detailed explanation of service charges including the differences and reasons for estimated and actual bills and why leaseholders in the same block may be paying different levels of charge
R2	Housing should deliver greater transparency on the deliberations and decisions of Due Regard Panels (for Major Works) including giving leaseholder representatives an opportunity to present their case against works to the panel, providing feedback to local leaseholders on the outcomes and reasons for its decisions.
R3	Housing should implement a key lessee system, seeking maximum estate coverage, similar to the one delivered by City West Homes.
R4	The key elements of service provision at a local level, such as cleaning, need to be subject to greater independent quality review and that the involvement of leaseholders in estate inspections needs to be enhanced. The Working Group believe the key lessee system would support this.

Information and Communication

26. The Working Group was given a copy of the Leaseholder's Information Pack that was produced recently. This included a range of information about leaseholder services, service charges, arrears and the Alternative Dispute Resolution. The Working Group felt that this was a significant step forward in providing information to leaseholders.
27. The Working Group also saw samples from both Housing and leaseholders of responses and letters covering service charges enquiries, complaints and arrears. They felt that some of these could be improved by providing better explanations and reducing the legal language used in early letters concerning arrears. It was accepted that this should increase as the situation becomes more serious.

28. As may be anticipated, there were significant discussions with Housing and leaseholders about service charges. Under the terms of the lease leaseholders are required to contribute to their share of the costs involved in the maintenance of their home and estate. Leaseholders are also required to contribute to the landlord costs of management and administration. Service charges are payable based on an estimate of the actual costs that the Council expects to occur within the financial year. At the end of the year, once the actual costs are known, leaseholders are then sent a further invoice setting out where actual costs are higher or lower than the original estimate.
29. There were issues raised concerning the distribution of charges, the services – volume and quality – included within the service charge and how the management and administration charges were calculated.
30. Housing are looking to further develop the way that service charges are calculated and to make the system more transparent. In particular, they have just completed adopting the Housemark benchmarking study on administration and management. For the first time - and more extensively than other councils using Housemark - this collected and calculated the charges for managing:
- major and cyclical repairs
 - responsive repairs
 - caretaking services
 - managing leaseholder services
 - administration of leaseholder services
31. The Working Group welcomed the recent Housemark benchmarking study on the administration and management charge, but felt that more work needs to be done to improve the transparency and robustness of data underpinning its service charges, including management and administration.
32. In discussion with leaseholders, there was considerable focus on the level of services provided that were included within service charges. Most commonly this concerned paying for services which were felt to have a relatively low frequency or where the quality was poor. Examples included blocks where cleaning was provided for a relatively short time each week or where the security on common entrances was faulty.
33. The Working Group felt that some of these concerns – and the complaints that follow – could be reduced if more information was provided to leaseholders (and tenants) about caretaking schedules or horticultural maintenance regimes. These could be provided as part of the service charge estimates.
34. Overall, the Working Group recognise that while it is clear that real efforts have been made to improve relations with leaseholders, including the recent open days, the development of the new leaseholder handbook and efforts to improve the transparency and calculation of service charges, more needs to be done to build the relationship with leaseholders.

35. The Working Group makes the following recommendations.

- R5 Housing should conduct a review of its leaseholder communications, and guidance pack with a view to increasing accessibility and penetration of leaseholders.
- R6 Housing must publish the “apportionment of time” data that informed the Housemark benchmarking exercise. Housing should undertake, in partnership with leaseholders, a review programme focused on improving service charge transparency and data provision.
- R7 Housing should send all leaseholders – and tenants – the caretaking schedule for their block, details of the annual horticultural maintenance programme, and clarify which other blocks are included in the estate cleaning service charge. The Working Group would also encourage Housing to consider including full details of the works covered by the block maintenance charge in the ‘Actual’.

Responding to Service Users

- 36. The Working Group was advised that Housing’s service improvement plan contained a number of actions to improve customer care. These included improving internal communications, systems support, procedure manuals, staff training and information for leaseholders. There were also a number of service standards that Housing must adhere to. These included the Corporate Customer Promise, Housing Service Standards, Complaints Procedure, Caretaking Standards (under review), Repairs Standards and the Equality Standard.
- 37. A new I.T system is currently bringing together disparate systems across the service and this is beginning to improve integration and service response. In particular, Housing worked with the contractor to improve the leaseholder’s module and this has been completed. There are also plans to bring Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) into the system. There was still some work however, to complete this.
- 38. A further innovation was the implementation of the internal Leaseholder Services Panel that brings together services across central services and housing management that provide services or impact on leaseholders. The Panel then takes a problem solving approach to improve services to leaseholders.
- 39. In the last year Housing has invested significantly in training for nearly 300 staff on leaseholders and leases to generate understanding and awareness of the nature of the Council’s relationship with leaseholders and the importance of this customer base. The training focused on Customer Care around the key issues for leaseholders including what is in leases and the responsibilities of the housing service and of leaseholders around maintenance, repairs, subletting and anti-social behaviour.

40. In its evidence from leaseholders, the Working Group heard that there was a strong feeling that leaseholders received a “second class” service and slow responses to their enquiries and complaints. A common theme was that communication was passed through many different sections and it wasn’t always clear where a complaint or enquiry had gone. It was highlighted by leaseholders that it was difficult to meet face to face with housing officers or get a response from senior management when complaints were escalated. This was repeated throughout the meetings with leaseholders and covered a wide range of issues including caretaking, repairs and service charges.
41. The Working Group recognised the significant effort that Housing was putting into improving communication and the relationship with leaseholders. In particular, they welcomed the investment in staff training and initiatives to open the service up to leaseholders, such as open days and the proposed pilot leaseholder surgeries.
42. The Working Group was concerned however, at the level of frustration experienced by leaseholders in getting responses to enquiries or complaints. They felt that if these could be responded to more promptly and resolved wherever possible, the relationship between Housing and leaseholders would improve significantly. The Council’s Corporate Customer Promise (see Appendix One) was felt to be pertinent to this issue, as it contained a number of service standards that if implemented consistently throughout the service would have a significant impact.
43. The Working Group makes the following recommendations.

R8	The Working Group welcome the steps being taken to improve staff training and Leaseholder open days. These actions should be maintained and embedded further to improve leaseholder engagement.
R9	Housing should ensure that it implements and embeds fully all aspects of the Council’s Customer Promise, in both process and culture.

The Complaints Procedure and Alternative Dispute Resolution Scheme

44. There are currently three options if leaseholders have a complaint.
- The Corporate Complaints Procedure
 - The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme which can include arbitration/adjudication/mediation
 - Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT)
45. The route chosen depends on the type of dispute, how far negotiations have reached with the Dispute Resolution Team and the rules laid down by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. Leaseholder complaints can currently be received at the Home Ownership Service, Area Housing Management and Local Housing Offices.
46. The Working Group received a briefing on the ADR process from Housing that advised that the Dispute Resolution team was set up in 2002 to deal with complaints from leaseholders about the services they receive.

47. The Dispute Resolution team from March 2005 until present has concentrated on resolving the historic disputes raised prior to April 2006. For the 2005/2006 financial year there were a total of 365 disputes registered with the Dispute Resolution team. This represents only 2.4% of the 13,000 Service Charge bills and 2,000 Major Works bills issued. Of this 365, 360 were adding an additional year to their current dispute and 5 were opening new disputes. The backlog has been dealt with on an area basis, and this was due to be completed by March 2007.
48. The Council and Tower Hamlets Leaseholder Association jointly requested a review of the scheme in 2004 to review the procedures used and the effectiveness of the team. The revised procedure is similar to the Corporate Complaints process graduating from stage one through to stage three. At stage one it is dealt with as a complaint and the aim is to resolve as many as possible at this stage. Under the new procedure, there are 167 complaints with none progressed to stage 2 or dispute.
49. If no settlement can be reached then the option of requesting a determination by a third party is discussed with the leaseholder. At November 2006 the number of cases that have opted for a third party decision since January 2006 are:

	Mediation	Adjudication	Arbitration	LVT
Complete	4	1	2	6
Planned	2	1	5	10

50. It is clearly stated within the Tower Hamlets Leaseholder Guide that the leaseholder may not withhold estimated service charges during the dispute process, without the Council's permission.
51. The meeting with the Tower Hamlets Leaseholder Association focused predominantly on the Alternative Dispute Resolution scheme. They felt that they had not been adequately consulted about the redevelopment of the ADR process. They felt that whilst the ADR had originally been developed by all stakeholders, it now favoured the Council. They did not believe it achieves what it sought out to do and constantly needs quick fixes.
52. There were consistent concerns expressed about the fairness and openness of the current system. It was clear from those that had entered the ADR that trust in the scheme had broken down. There was also agreement amongst leaseholders that the current system is very confusing. In particular it was not clear which channel leaseholders with issues or complaints should go down.
53. When asked how they would improve the ADR, the THLA wanted to see greater independence within it.
54. In comparison, City West Homes do not have an ADR process, instead relying solely on the corporate complaints procedure. Due to City West being an ALMO the first two stages take place within the ALMO with the third escalating to the Chief Executive of the Council. If a complaint can not be resolved it would be escalated to the Leaseholder Valuation Tribunal.

55. A summary comparison of the two situations is shown below:

Westminster	Tower Hamlets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 LVT cases since 2000 • 5 were dispensation or test cases brought by the Council • 2 current cases where leaseholders are challenging the reasonableness of management charges and methodology of recharging • 4 cases where settlements reached or applicant withdrew 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No LVT cases prior to 2002 • 7 LVT cases instigated by the Council • 7 LVT cases brought by leaseholders • 4 LVT cases referred by the County Court

56. In response to the concerns of leaseholders, Housing agreed that that the routes for making a complaint are not clear and this needs improvement. Housing is committed to making the process more streamlined and cost effective. In the short term, a plain English version of the procedure is currently being produced, including a flow chart that outlines the key stages and options to leaseholders.

57. The ADR scheme was initially brought in to deal with the number of historic disputes. This is now concluding with only 180 disputes in 2006/2007. In addition, other well performing authorities deal with complaints effectively without an alternative process. The Working Group felt that there is the potential to reconsider the need for an ADR scheme.

58. It is also noted that while the number of leaseholders involved in dispute is a small percentage, it is a serious concern for those involved, particularly more vulnerable groups. The Working Group felt that any changes implemented to make the process more straightforward would be welcomed.

59. Based on these findings the Working Group makes the following recommendations:

- R10 There is clear evidence that a significant number of leaseholders lack confidence in the current Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme's independence and fairness. The Working Group believe that 3 options should be considered by Housing and Cabinet, following consultation with leaseholders and their representatives:
- iv. Relaunch the current ADR scheme. There would need to be clear communication to leaseholders that the system had changed and what the improvements were intended to achieve. This would include:
 - clearer information about the new transparent ADR process including
 - That the ADR is one option and clearly set out the different options, and when each one is most appropriate.
 - Clearer guidelines around the specifics of the process, including the rights and responsibilities of both parties.
 - v. Disband the ADR process and make all complaints go through the corporate complaints procedure. If this option was taken it would be necessary for an option of arbitration/mediation to take place between stage two and three of the complaints procedure.
 - vi. Develop a new ADR scheme reflecting current industry best practice

R11 The current relationship between the ADR scheme, the use of a Leaseholder Valuation Tribunal and Corporate Complaints Process is not clear. As a matter of urgency, Housing should, in consultation with key leaseholder groups, provide clear guidance to staff and leaseholders on the role of each process.

Home Ownership Service Structure and the Role of the Local Housing Office

60. The Working Group received information about the structure of services to leaseholders. This is set out below.

Responsibilities of Home Ownership Service, Local Housing Offices and Area Housing Management

- **Service Charge Team**
Responsible for the calculation of estimated and actual service charges and dealing with enquiries about those charges. Where a leaseholder has a general enquiry such as abandoned vehicles, nuisance, fly tipping, anti social behaviour, cleaning standards, these are dealt with through the Area or Local Housing Office.
- **Right to Buy (RTB) / Resales Team**
Responsible for the statutory administration of the RTB scheme, providing information to solicitors and administering the resale of properties. It also deals with enquiries about extensions of leases and the sale of additional land/properties to leaseholders.
- **Income Team**
Responsible for the production of invoices, ensuring payments are correctly applied to leaseholders accounts including any adjustments, the processing of bank standing orders and the production of instalment payment slips.
- **Arrears Team**
Responsible for the collection of any unpaid service charges, insurance and ground rent, including major works and agreeing repayment proposals and ensuring that debt advice is made available to leaseholders that may be facing financial hardship.
- **Legal Team**
Responsible for collection of service charge debt through legal proceedings once the service charge arrears team have exhausted the arrears process.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution Team**
Responsible for dealing with complaints from leaseholders through the Councils dispute resolution processes.

- Local Housing Offices (LHOs)
Local Housing Offices are the first point of contact for enquiries, queries and complaints for all council housing residents, providing one point of contact for all service users. They provide a leasehold management service for all leaseholders and subtenants of leaseholders including providing information on frequency of cleaning; horticultural maintenance programmes; resolving anti social behaviour, responding to basic service charge enquiries; advice on general Council services such as refuse collection, environmental health services and street parking
- Area Housing Management
The Area Housing Office deals with the monitoring functions of the LHOs. They are responsible for caretaking, including investigating where cleaning programmes were not completed; additional cleans required and service standards not met or maintained. It is also responsible for monitoring the quality of services including resolving complaints received about services delivered from the LHOs.

61. The Home Ownership service is currently under review to make sure it best meets the needs of customers and other stakeholders. This is being considered by the Leaseholder Service Panel. The current suggestion is to introduce a more customer facing service - possibly with customer advocates - but retain most services in a “back office”. Housing is also considering rationalising Local Housing Offices into a smaller number of Area Offices that provide a wider range of services.
62. The clear message from leaseholders was that there was a lack of responsibility and transparency in the current structure. There is a frustration that issues get moved between sections, leading to a long responses times and a feeling that no-one is taking responsibility for leaseholder issues. This in turn had developed what was described as a ‘pass the buck’ culture. When asked how they would resolve this issue the majority of leaseholders suggested that a dedicated leaseholder team was needed.
63. The Working Group considered City West Homes that has a single leaseholder service with end-to-end accountability. There is no separation in accountability from issuing the charges to recovering them. This structure was implemented by the ALMO to minimise process breakdowns. The leasehold section is broken into patches with a named officer. This officer is responsible for service charges, arrears, resales, sub-letting and remortgage for their area. The only issues that are dealt with separately are major works (consultation and billing) and right to buy. City West claim that by introducing this structure not only have they improved customer care for leaseholders, staff retention and satisfaction has also improved.
64. The Working Group felt that Housing should consider this model as part of their restructuring and make the following recommendation.

R12	<p>The Working Group would encourage Housing to adopt a model which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • officers within the central team being given geographical patches to provide a more cohesive service • Specific Leaseholder Officers within the Local Housing Office, proportionate to the number of leaseholder properties • More leaseholder services to be provided at the Local Housing Office.
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Advice and Support for Leaseholders in Arrears and for Major Works

Arrears

65. The Working Group received a briefing from Housing setting out the process and policy around arrears and arrears management. The service carries out a financial assessment of leaseholders in arrears and considers a number of payment options. Where, there are outstanding arrears, mortgage lenders are contacted to inform them of this. Some cases are referred to the County Court to collect outstanding debt. For the period 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006, County Court judgements were issued on 364 cases. In the current year (2006/07) judgements have been issued on 120 leaseholders.
66. Housing alerts leaseholders to any arrears and issues reminder letters ensuring leaseholders are aware that legal action can ultimately result if an arrangement is not made. Housing also provides resources to support financial advice to leaseholders through Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) and the House Proud scheme.
67. The Working Group makes the following recommendation.

R13 Housing should review the current contract with Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) so that it provides a service that deals specifically with managing the financial issues faced by leaseholders.
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Major Works

68. Housing provided detailed information to the Working Group on the main aspects of Major Works recharging including s125 of the Housing Act 1985, consultation and funding. Detailed information was also provided on Major Works recharges exceeding £10,000. For the period June 2005 – November 2006 the number of leaseholder charges in excess of £10,000 was 136.
69. The initial and reference period (generally the first five years of the lease) of a tenant's purchase under the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme (section 125) does affect the Council's ability to recharge for Major Works. This means that Major Works charges are discounted in the first five years following a RTB if these works were not identified in the RTB section 125 notice. There is also a Mandatory Service Charge Reduction in relation to Major Work bills over £10,000 where specific funding is used.
70. Tower Hamlets was one of only a few authorities to introduce discretionary capping when it was made possible in 1997. The scheme is now restricted to leaseholders who are receiving a state pension, income support or jobseekers allowance, live in the property permanently, are the original right-to-buy purchaser and not in arrears on their service charge if works are not detailed on the offer notice and individual recharges exceed £10,000 and/or exceptional hardship can be demonstrated.
71. A number of leaseholders suggested that the restrictions on the cap be removed but Working Group could not support this. The Working Group felt that the focus should be on providing leaseholders with the right information and assistance to deal with Major Works bills.

72. The Working Group was concerned about the level of financial hardship being experienced by some leaseholders as a result of Major Works bills. It recognised that, in the current financial climate, it is extremely difficult for the Council to find the substantial extra funding required to increase assistance to leaseholders to tackle the financial hardship created by Major Works. Any increased subsidy could only be achieved by placing additional burdens on tenants or Council Tax payers. The Working Group felt that the Government must provide more financial support and guidance to local councils to help leaseholders deal with significant Major Works bills.
73. In the interim, the Working Group would encourage Housing to seek out examples of good practice in other local authorities and actively promote Tower Hamlets Community Credit Union as a credible savings vehicle for all Council leaseholders wishing to set aside regular deposits in anticipation of future Major Works bills.
74. The Working Group makes the following recommendation.

R14 Housing should meet with Tower Hamlets Community Credit Union to explore developing specific support for leaseholders so that they can access affordable loans.

Statute-barred Debt

75. When the Working Group met with THLA the issue of statute-barred debt was raised. It was pointed out that it is only if a leaseholder raises the issue of statute-barred debt that the Council responds. Statute-barred debt occurs when a lender takes no action to recover a debt within six years. When this happens the debtor can argue that the debt can no longer be claimed
76. The Working Group sought clarification on this from Housing and was advised that debt that is statute-barred is not time set; it is the extent to which the debt is live. If the leaseholder is in debt the arrears team does not routinely inform them that a proportion of the debt may be statute-barred. Legally once the leaseholder has agreed to pay off their arrears they have to pay off all their debt. Housing believes that it is right not to proactively research whether each element of a leaseholder's debt is statute-barred as it is still money owed to the Council.
77. Based on the evidence heard throughout this review, the Working Group believes that the Council's philosophy and approach to statute-barred debt must be changed. The Council must develop, as a matter of priority, clearer data to understand what debt is statute-barred and ensure that it communicates this to affected leaseholders clearly and unambiguously.
78. The Working Group makes the following recommendation.

R15 Housing should provide clear guidance to leaseholders on the law surrounding statute-barred debt.

Conclusion

79. The working group welcomes the progress made by Housing Services in improving the services provided to leaseholders and its efforts to improve engagement and communications with these service users. There are however, a number of areas where services and customer care could be improved further.
80. Two overarching themes that have emerged from the review are around trust and transparency. While the Working Group commends the improvements made to services such as caretaking, the new service charge model and the new I.T system, more strategic changes have to be made to the service in order for the relationship between leaseholders and the Council to improve.
81. At the Home Ownership Level, Improvements need to be implemented to improve customer care, focusing on the accuracy of information and timely responses to questions or complaints. Much greater consideration need to be given to the complaints procedure. The current system is too complex and lacks transparency.
82. The infrastructure of the Home Ownership Service needs to be developed to provide a higher level of support. The introduction of the service charge model, the new I.T system and staff training will lead to improvements but the structure of the team and communications with the Local Housing offices will need significant improvements for a real change to be implemented. Structural changes will complement and encourage cultural change.
83. This Review was designed as a case study of the customer care received by members of the public using the Council's services. As result of the review the Working Group makes the following general recommendations.

R16	Communication underpins how the Council deals with local residents. In improving the responsiveness of services , the Council needs to invest further so that communication is clear, accessible and appropriate to services. This is particularly important in explaining the reasons for the way that services are delivered, particularly where individual charges are being raised.
R17	The Council needs to explore further how it can get closer to customers. For front-line high volume services such as housing, it would seem beneficial to have a strong connection between service providers and localities. This seems to provide the greatest potential to build a strong customer relationship based around both ownership and accountability.
R18	The Corporate Complaints Process is a crucial part of the Council's delivery of the customer promise. The Council should ensure that its relationship with any other statutory or non-statutory processes that directorates may use is clear to both staff and residents.
R19	The Customer Promise is a vital statement of the Council's culture and delivery of Excellent Public Services. The Council should develop clearer mechanisms for ensuring both the spirit and content of the Customer Promise are being delivered in Directorates.

Tower Hamlets Council's Customer Promise

We will always:

- Give you our name and section
- Be polite, helpful and honest, as we would expect you to be
- Treat you with respect, as we would like to be treated
- Treat you fairly
- Take responsibility for assisting you and not pass you around
- Listen to your views
- Make it clear what we can and cannot do
- Be accountable for the service we provide
- Consider your needs when designing our services
- Admit when things go wrong and do our best to put them right

Telephones

We aim to answer your call within 5 rings during our published office hours
We aim to resolve your enquiry at the first point of contact – or someone will call you back within an agreed time scale
If you leave us a message we will try to get back to you within one working day
We aim never to let a phone go unanswered during our published office hours

Letters, Emails and Faxes

We aim to provide a full response to letters in under 10 working days.
If we can't, we will send you an acknowledgement after five days telling you who is dealing with the matter and when to expect a full reply
We will always try to use plain language, and give you our contact details
Faxes and Emails are treated like letters
We will ensure emails have our name, job title, telephone number, and website address

Face to Face

We aim to start dealing with your enquiry within 15 minutes at our One Stop Shops and other receptions
If you prefer not to wait, we will offer you an appointment at a time to suit you (where possible)
We will try to see you promptly if you arrive on time – and will not make you wait if it can be avoided
We will see you in a private area if you prefer – although you may need to book or wait
We will provide you with translation and interpreting services should you require them
All our reception staff will wear name badges

Service Standards

We will let you know what to expect from us
We ask you to provide us with any information we request to help us give you the service you require

Listening

We will find ways to listen to your views about our services and will publish the results
We will carry out independent mystery shopping exercises and act on the results
We will make it easier for you to comment on our services by introducing comment cards
And if things go wrong, we will make it easy for you to complain and will do our best to put things right
Stage 1 Complaints will be dealt with in 10 working days and Stage 2 and 3 in 20 working days

Visits

You will be offered a choice of morning or afternoon when requesting an appointment, including specific times where possible and evening and weekend appointments where we can
If you are out when we visit, we will leave a card with our contact details
We will show you identity cards so you know who we are
We will treat your home with respect

Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

To find out more about Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

Please contact:

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Agenda Item 9.2

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 May 2007	Unrestricted		9.2
Report of: Sara Williams Assistant Chief Executive		Title: Report of the Graduate Unemployment Scrutiny Working Group		
Originating Officer(s): Alan Steward Scrutiny Policy Manager		Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Graduate Unemployment Scrutiny Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Endorse the draft report of the Graduate Unemployment Scrutiny Working Group
- 2.2 The Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree the final report before its submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for Learning Achievement and Leisure.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

Scrutiny Review File held in Scrutiny Policy Team

Alan Steward
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3. Background

- 3.1 The Working Group was established in October 2006 to investigate the issue of graduate unemployment in the borough.
- 3.2 The group first considered information and statistics about graduate unemployment and the part played by a number of different organisations in assisting local unemployed. At a focus group with graduates, the working group heard about the experiences of local unemployed or under employed graduates. These helped give members insight into the difficulties faced in securing a job locally after graduating. The Scrutiny Lead also met with local University Careers Services to find out about the services and support offered to graduates and with East London Business Alliance about their work to increase links between employers and universities.
- 3.3 The report with recommendations is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Once agreed, the Working Group's recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet for a response.

4. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. Equal Opportunity Implications

- 6.1 Graduate unemployment is an issue that affects young people and can affect different communities disproportionately. Due to the lack of statistical information available, it is difficult to consider the equalities implications. One of the recommendations suggests commissioning research to establish a baseline and this may consider equality opportunity implications.

7. Anti-Poverty Implications

- 7.1 Securing graduate employment will increase the earning potential of graduates and this may help alleviate some poverty.

8. Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

- 8.1 There are no direct actions for a greener environment arising from the report.

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the Working Group's report or recommendations.

Appendix 1 Report of the Graduate Unemployment Scrutiny Working Group

Graduate Unemployment

Report of the Transition from Education to Employment
Scrutiny Working Group

Tower Hamlets Council
May 2007



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Acknowledgements

The Working Group would like to thank all the officers and partners that supported this review. The views and perspectives of everyone involved have helped to shape the final recommendations of this report. We want to thank especially the graduates who participated in the focus group and who so willingly shared their experiences with us. We hope this report goes some way to responding to the many important issues they raised.

Working Group chair:

Councillor Dr Stephanie Eaton (Liberal Democrat)

Working Group members:

Councillor Shahed Ali (Respect)
Councillor Mohammed Shahid Ali (Labour)
Councillor Peter Golds (Conservative)
Councillor Ahmed Omer (Labour)
Councillor Carli-Harper Penman (Labour)
Councillor Bill Turner (Labour)

Service Providers:

Kevan Collins – Director, Children’s Services
Mary Durkin – Interim Service Head - Youth and Community Learning
Sue Hinds – Access to Employment Manager
Simon Rea – Children’s Services
Mike Tyler – Director, Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership (EBP)
Sheila Bentham – Tower Hamlets College
Michael Masterson – Director, Careers London
Nahid Mortuza – Careers London
Frances Gow – Employability Manager, University of East London (UEL)
Liz Smith – Head of Careers Service, Queen Mary University (QMU)
Sally Roberts – Programme Director (Tower Hamlets) East London Business Alliance (ELBA)

Scrutiny and Equalities:

Zoë Swanson – Scrutiny Policy Officer
Alan Steward – Scrutiny Policy Manager
Michael Keating – Service Head

Chair's foreword

Tower Hamlets is a borough of remarkable contrasts. Alongside substantial deprivation, poverty and disadvantage there are some of the highest paid jobs and biggest employers in the United Kingdom. The Canary Wharf complex employs 80,000 people and continues to expand while the scientific and medical community centred on the Royal London Hospital employs over 8,000 staff. Businesses in the borough provide twice as many jobs as there are economically active residents, and average earnings of those working in the borough are twice the national average.

Despite the apparent abundance of opportunities, some residents of Tower Hamlets struggle to find rewarding and fulfilling work. The borough suffers from higher levels of unemployment than the London average and only half the working age residents are in employment – a proportion which is the lowest in the country.

Since 2001, more local people have entered and successfully completed higher education degree courses. Anecdotal evidence and some limited data suggest however, that new graduates can struggle to find work commensurate with their qualifications. There are opportunities available, and residents are successfully obtaining qualifications, yet the borough's graduates, particularly young graduates, can encounter obstacles to finding suitable work. It was this anomaly that the working party sought to investigate.

The recommendations contained in the report are intended to improve our knowledge of graduate unemployment and under-employment, and, with the support of local employers, universities and others, to set in place structures to remove the barriers that have been identified. Local graduates have immense talent, knowledge and skills to contribute to the economy of Tower Hamlets, London and the UK. We need to ensure, for their sake and the sake of our community, that they have the confidence, opportunity and incentives to achieve their full potential.

Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton
Scrutiny Lead, Learning Achievement and Leisure

Recommendations

The Working Group recommendations focus on areas requiring consideration and action by the Council and other organisations working to support local graduates into appropriate employment and training. It is important to stress that improving the opportunities for local graduates to develop their employment skills and enter appropriate level roles is not the responsibility of one agency, it's something that many different organisations can help contribute to. That's why we're directing our report and recommendations to the Tower Hamlet Partnership's Learning Achievement and Leisure Community Plan Action Group (CPAG).

- R1 The Learning Achievement and Leisure CPAG commissions research to establish the extent and nature of graduate unemployment and underemployment in the borough to provide a baseline to inform future action.**
- R2 The Council expands in-house graduate training to maximise opportunities for graduates to gain skills, experience and professional qualifications in a public sector workplace setting, regardless of their ethnic background.**
- R3 A Task Group is established to champion employment opportunities for local graduates, and to coordinate initiatives to achieve this. This should include Council officers, employers, universities and graduates.**
- R4 The Task Group explores:**
- using Skillsmatch to develop volunteering or secondment opportunities for graduates to gain experience of working in local companies and organisations
 - developing a mentoring scheme for local graduates.
- R5 The Task Group explores:**
- how to identify the key employment skills shortages now and in the future based on the likely development of the local labour market projected in the Tower Hamlets Regeneration Strategy
 - the best means of improving the range and relevance of careers advice to the local labour market.
- R6 The Task Group support and monitor the proposed East London Business Alliance (ELBA) and Queen Mary University Graduate Network pilot to increase the opportunities for local graduates to meet local employers and to consider how this can be extended across the borough.**
- R7 The Task Group develop further the links between schools and employers by coordinating and facilitating careers workshops / advice sessions between all agencies.**

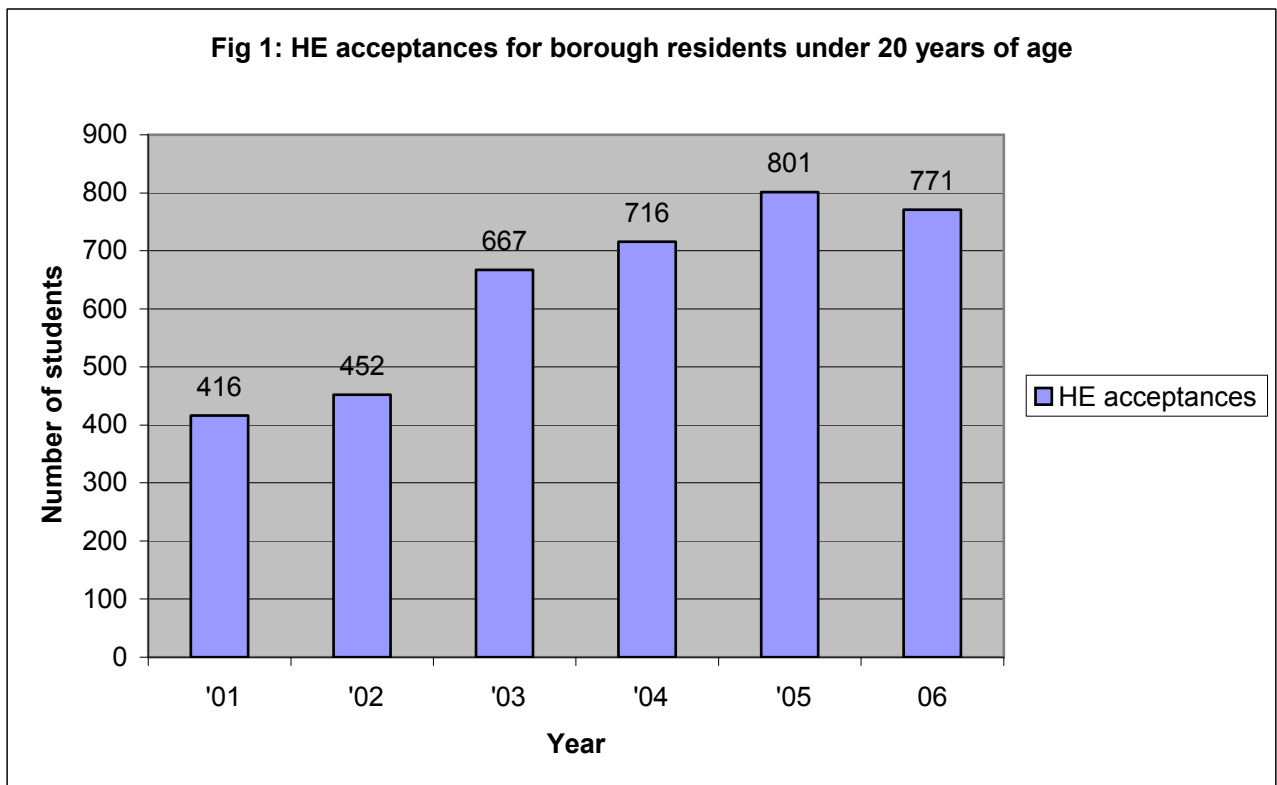
Introduction

1. The Working Group was established in October 2006 to investigate graduate underemployment and unemployment in Tower Hamlets. The intention of the investigation was to explore the claims that local graduates face more barriers in accessing appropriate employment opportunities than graduates elsewhere. It was agreed that the review would investigate the problems that arise when graduates attempt to make the transition from education to employment. The Working Group was particularly concerned to investigate the following issues:
 - Common barriers facing graduates in accessing employment or training opportunities within the Borough
 - Support the Council currently provides to graduates looking for employment or training opportunities
 - Co-ordinated support services for new graduates.
2. The Working Group agreed to investigate these issues, and hoped to reach recommendations that would improve the targeted support available to local graduates seeking employment or training opportunities commensurate with their skills.
3. The Working Group established was politically balanced and comprised seven councillors. The group was chaired by Councillor Dr Stephanie Eaton, Scrutiny Lead for Learning Achievement and Leisure.
4. The Working Group first met with representatives from the Council's job brokerage service, Skillsmatch; members of the Tower Hamlets Employment Solutions Partnership, which includes Tower Hamlets College and Job Centre Plus; voluntary sector support provider Careers London and the Chair of the Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership (EBP). At this meeting the Working Group received a strategic overview of the services the Council offers to graduates, which are delivered primarily through Skillsmatch.
5. In early January, a focus group was held with 10 local graduates to gain their perspective on the issues raised in the first review meeting including barriers to employment they have faced, their experiences of seeking appropriate work and the support they would have welcomed.
6. In order to involve local universities, the Chair of the Working Group met with representatives from two of the three university career services in the borough: Queen Mary University (QMU) and the University of East London (UEL). The Chair was particularly interested to hear about the capacity the services have to support their graduates, take up of services and how employability is included in the academic curriculum.
7. Lastly officers met with Sally Roberts from the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) to discuss ways in which the Council and local universities can forge stronger links with local businesses.
8. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the Working Group's report and recommendations. The Council's Cabinet will then respond to the report and its recommendations. All of the organisations and individuals that participated in the review will be sent a copy of the report and Cabinet's response.

Findings

A. Graduate Unemployment in Tower Hamlets – What do we know?

9. The number of students under 20 years of age accepted onto higher education (HE) courses from the borough's school and college sixth forms has risen significantly since late 2001 (see Fig 1). According to data provided by University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) the number of students accepted in 2005 was 30.2% higher than the baseline in 2001. The number of students under 20 and resident in the borough, accepted in 2006 however, was less than in 2005. This reduction of 3.7% may reflect the national trend brought about by the introduction of fees.



10. In 2002 only 2.2% of students resident in the borough were accepted on to HE courses at universities outside London, and 84% went to just seven institutions (Queen Mary's University, London (QMUL), London Metropolitan, Greenwich, University of East London (UEL), Westminster, Kings and Goldsmiths). Figures for 2006 indicate that whilst the majority of students still choose to study in London, choices are more varied with 63.6% of students accepted by the seven universities named above and 12.4% by universities outside London. It should be pointed out that a smaller proportion of students chose to study outside London than in 2005 (19%).
11. The Russell Group Universities are the major research universities in the country and are seen as an elite group within the overall university system. In London it includes Imperial College, King's College, London School of Economics and Political Science and University College London. Changes in acceptances to the Russell Group Universities have also increased both in the number of students being accepted and the number of universities. In 2002, 6 Russell Group Universities accepted 22 students resident in the Borough. In 2006, 14 Russell Group Universities accepted 56 students.

12. The rapid increase in the number of local students entering higher education, and therefore competing for 'graduate' jobs after completing their studies, has led to concerns about graduate unemployment and underemployment in the borough.

Data on graduate unemployment

13. Recent figures released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show one in three university leavers to be working in non-graduate jobs, and the proportion of university leavers believed to be unemployed (from destination surveys) to have risen slightly from 5.9% in 2004 to 6.0% in 2005.
14. It is suggested that Tower Hamlets and neighbouring Hackney not only have one of the highest unemployment rates in the UK but one of the highest graduate unemployment rates. Unfortunately it is difficult to verify this as this data is not currently collected by Job Centre Plus or the Department for Work and Pensions.
15. Tower Hamlets Index and Strategic Plan monitoring reports show benefit claims have increased by those in the under 25 age group. The 2005/6 Annual Residents' Survey highlights a significant increase in local concerns about a perceived lack of jobs (up 7 pts) in comparison with 2005.
16. At present the Council has no corporate policy on graduate employment, as supporting students after the age of 19 (unless they have special educational needs or they claim Job Seekers Allowance) is not a statutory responsibility of the Council or its partners. At present, the Council is focusing resources on ensuring 14-19 year olds develop the core skills and labour market awareness they require in order to make the best choices in higher education. It is hoped that, in time, this focus will have a direct positive impact on graduate unemployment.
17. During 2005-06, of the economically active population (those aged 16 and over who are either in employment or unemployed), the unemployment rate was 12.8% for men and 12.5% for women.

B Graduate Employment Support in Tower Hamlets

COUNCIL SUPPORT

18. At the first meeting of the working group, Sue Hinds, Employment Manager, Skillsmatch outlined the support the Council currently provides to graduates in the borough, both through Skillsmatch and the Employment Solutions Partnership.

Skillsmatch

19. Skillsmatch offer general job brokerage services to graduates, as well as running a 16-week work placement programme, which gives local graduates the opportunity to gain work experience with local employers. Graduates are offered £100 a week on the programme, which has a 97% success rate of finding permanent employment for the graduates at the end of the programme.
20. In 2005/6, there were 190 graduates registered with Skillsmatch; of these, 78% were BME with 58% being Bangladeshi. 92 (48%) were placed into employment. As of November 2006/07, there were 65 graduates registered with Skillsmatch; 95% are BME

with 73% being Bangladeshi. 22 of these graduates were part of the work placement programme.

Tower Hamlets Graduate Development Programme

21. The Council runs its own in-house graduate training scheme called the Tower Hamlets Graduate Development Programme. Since March 2000, the programme has provided over 100 local graduates from black and minority ethnic communities with the opportunity to gain work experience, valuable skills and personal development as part of the Council's positive action programme. The programme provides graduates with two years of professional and personal development, including post-graduate study. Most participants secure full time employment with the Council following the two-year training programme and the scheme is widely recognised as an example of good practice.

Employment Solutions Partnership

22. Members of the Employment Solutions Partnership include Skillsmatch, Tower Hamlets College and Job Centre Plus. These partnership agencies offer support to all job seekers in the borough, including local graduates. The work of the partnership focuses resources and avoids the duplication of services, with each member concentrating on their strengths, to ensure that job seekers and employers experience an excellent service.

23. The key Employment Solutions initiative aimed at graduates is the Tower Hamlets College Graduate Management and Career Development programme. The College currently runs this targeted scheme for local graduates, which offers the following support:

- an opportunity to take a short, often regulatory, qualification
- a 5 day intensive Graduate Management Programme concentrating on interview skills and identifying employer competencies
- a final work placement

24. The College believes that for schemes like this to succeed, more local employers need to be engaged so that there are more placement opportunities.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR SUPPORT

25. Michael Masterson, the Director of Careers London (formally, Graduate Forum) introduced the work his organisation does with local graduates. Formed in 1997 as a response to the increasing number of people from Tower Hamlets entering higher education, Careers London offers career support through workshops, advice and guidance sessions, accredited training and a work placement scheme

26. Careers London supports approximately 500 graduates a year, the majority of whom are from Tower Hamlets. Each graduate receives between 1-2 hours intensive individual support. Careers London project work also includes:

- working with first and second year students to make sure they are informed about the labour market they will be entering and sufficiently prepared to be able to access employment opportunities

- supporting local graduates on to bridging courses that give them the skills and knowledge they require in order to access employment opportunities in different sectors
- broadening the horizons of local graduates by informing them of the opportunities that exist in sectors they might not have previously considered such as construction, insurance and the not-for-profit sector.

Key Discussion Points

27. The group agreed that the availability of jobs is not an issue but that the challenge lay in creating effective pathways for graduates to access them. Local graduates are perhaps also in need of more encouragement as the local problem of ‘intergenerational joblessness’ could be having an impact on younger people’s career aspirations.
28. Several group members stated that underemployment is more of a problem than unemployment in Tower Hamlets and in many ways is harder to measure. Any research undertaken to capture the picture of graduate unemployment in the borough must take this into consideration and attempt to capture the ‘type’ of work employed graduates are doing.

Recommendations:

We recognise that the Council has no statutory responsibility to collect data on graduate unemployment, and although we welcome the fact that resources are being focused on ensuring those at school level have an awareness of labour market demands and skills shortages before they enter higher education, we feel that more baseline data is needed on the level of graduate unemployment in the borough. We therefore recommend:

- R1 The Learning Achievement and Leisure CPAG commissions research to establish the extent and nature of graduate unemployment and underemployment in the borough to provide a baseline to inform future action.**
- R2 The Council expands in-house graduate training to maximise opportunities for graduates to gain skills, experience and professional qualifications in a public sector workplace setting, regardless of their ethnic background.**
- R3 A Task Group is established to ‘champion’ employment opportunities for local graduates, and to coordinate initiatives to achieve this. This should include Council officers, employers, universities and graduates.**

C Graduate Experiences

29. On 8 January 2007, a focus group was held with local graduates at Oxford House, Bethnal Green. There were 10 participants; 4 female, 6 male, from a mix of ethnic backgrounds. All the participants had attended London universities and had graduated in the last 2 years.

30. This session was designed to give the participants the opportunity to share their experiences since leaving higher education and of seeking employment and training opportunities. The focus group was based around 4 main issues, covering:

1. expectations
2. support
3. barriers
4. solutions

Expectations

31. Most of the graduates agreed that they assumed 'it would be easy' to get a job after graduating and that they would get jobs that related to the degree they took. Expectations were high because the graduates believed that if they had followed the "expected steps" in education (GCSEs, A Levels, Degree), a job would be the natural end result. All the graduates felt that failing to find a job or receiving no feedback from unsuccessful applications made them feel 'demoralised'.

Support

32. All the graduates said they looked for jobs and advice 'everywhere', including:

- local papers
- various websites, specifically Gumtree.com (an online resource for jobs, accommodation, travel and so on)
- pamphlets available from career advice providers
- Careers London
- Skillsmatch
- recruitment agencies

Barriers

33. The focus group participants talked at length about the barriers they had faced when looking for employment:

- not enough 'graduate' placement opportunities
- hard to get employment without adequate work experience
- lack of core skills (CV, interview, presentation, inter-personal skills)
- recruitment practices that screen on the basis of UCAS points are too arbitrary
- status of your University and Degree programme makes a difference to employers
- discrimination (some agreement that having a non-English name can be a barrier)
- strong competition; from other graduation years, those with Masters and International graduates' (especially for graduate programmes)

"You need to be an above average graduate' and 'stand out"... You're not just competing against graduates who graduated this year, but from past years too".

– Tower Hamlets Graduate

Solutions

34. More information and guidance that is coordinated and signposts services: graduates expressed the importance of 'knowing where to go and what help is available'. The graduates all agreed that they didn't know any support services were available to them, like Careers London, until they heard about them through word of mouth.

35. Graduates also agreed that earlier intervention is needed, and that schools and universities must play a bigger role in preparing young people for employment, through focusing more on employability (work placement years, work experience opportunities and so on)
36. Several graduates said that more exposure to the real world, through contact with practitioners throughout their education would have been invaluable, giving them the opportunity to get advice straight from the employers about what they need to do to get a job in certain industries. Connected to this idea was the view that 'different' job sectors / industries should advertise themselves more to graduates.
37. All the graduates agreed that a mentoring scheme for students could prove useful. Graduates who had gone through the process of looking for employment could share their experiences and offer advice. The graduates agreed that this type of scheme would have been useful to them and many said that they would be willing to be a mentor to others.

“We need more opportunities for real work experience such as project research / management, at the beginning of our new careers. We come out of university with no experience and hence it is difficult to complete a decent application form or relate to job specifications without any experience. If we could have a number of one month placements across various departments to build our portfolio, it would no doubt help us to, at least, secure interviews”

– Tower Hamlets Graduate

D Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Graduates

38. The Working Group was particularly interested to know whether unemployment or underemployment is a disproportionate problem for local BME graduates. Although we do not have the baseline data that would give us a conclusive answer at this stage, the general feeling of all those consulted was that BME graduates are not disproportionately affected by the graduate underemployment / unemployment problem, and that accessing appropriate level employment is a problem for all graduates nationally. Careers London Director, Michael Masterson believed that in the past BME graduates did experience more barriers, when the first generation of Bangladeshi graduates were leaving university to integrate into employment, but this is not the case anymore.
39. Any baseline destination survey commissioned would give us a clearer picture.

E The Role of University Careers Services

40. The Working Group agreed that local universities had a key role in supporting graduates into employment. The Working Group heard that the Council has some links with local universities but these have not been as broadly developed as has been the case with colleges in the past. The Review Chair met with the Employability Manager at the University of East London (UEL) and the Head of Careers Services at Queen Mary University (QMU). This meeting was used to explore the work the universities currently do with their student populations, and their capacity to do more to support students in their transition from education to employment.

41. Both universities' career services are eager to focus on employability with their students but the challenge lay in encouraging academics to see the value of including core skills and 'employability' as a component of their course curriculum.
42. Both universities coordinate a number of projects designed to develop the key career skills students lack such as CV writing and presentation skills. These projects are well received and students welcome the practical opportunity to practice their skills. These projects rely on students choosing them however, and are not compulsory or assessed. Many students will not and do not approach the career services until they have graduated and are finding it difficult to find employment.

Managing Expectations

43. Both universities accept that they have a role in managing the expectations of their students and preparing them for the challenging reality of finding a job. Many of the students at UEL and QMU have parental pressures / expectations placed upon them to enter 'professions' but don't always have the academic background to pursue these careers. This realisation can have a negative impact on students and demotivate them.
44. Both universities use graduate employability in their marketing to prospective students but recognise that there is more to do to ensure graduates actually end up in graduate jobs. Both universities use the cultural diversity of their student population to entice prospective employers to attend events. However, most London universities do this.

University Assessment Methods

45. Both universities' assessment methods are generally focused on writing skills (coursework and exams). Some QMU degree programmes, such as Medicine, Materials and Engineering, also use problem based learning - focusing on problem-solving and communication in a team environment. The careers service is working, in collaboration with other central services, to encourage the introduction of a range of curriculum based activities that promote these key skills.
46. The key career management skills graduates need targeted support to improve are:
 - interview skills (including non-verbal)
 - presentation skills
 - writing skills e.g. CVs and application forms

HESA University First Destination Surveys

47. The Review Chair was particularly interested to know how the findings from annual Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) destination surveys were used to develop services. The HESA Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey data provides information on the activities of students after leaving a higher education institution (HEI). Information collected includes the type of work a leaver has entered or what sort of further study they may be engaged in. The data is collected through a survey carried out approximately six months after students leave a HEI which arguably is too early to make a fair assessment of the longer term employment prospects of leavers from Higher Education. The data is used however, to develop services in a variety of ways including:

- providing students with an opportunity to investigate career ideas i.e. what have other graduates done?
- stimulating debate with academics reluctant to engage with employability issues
- for marketing purposes, both internally and externally
- identifying courses/academic departments that may need more input on career management/employability skills

48. DLHE destination data now measure the 'graduate-ness' of the job through five occupational classifications: traditional graduate (established professions e.g. solicitor, doctor), modern graduate (new professional fields e.g. software programmer, school teacher), new graduate (recent expansion and changing nature of roles e.g. marketing executive, engineer), niche graduate (requiring a degree to enter specialist areas of a typically non-graduate field e.g. graphic designer, nurse) and non-graduate.

49. In 2005/6 QMU carried out a longitudinal, follow-up destination survey of their 2002/3 graduates as part of a HESA pilot study. This was in addition to the first destination survey that was undertaken 6 months after the cohort had graduated. Depending on the success of the pilot and usefulness of the data, this survey is likely to be repeated for further cohorts.

"Performance indicators based on unemployment rates are unstable when measured at different points in graduates' early careers. More informative indicators of graduate 'employability' should be based on the quality of graduates' jobs." – Abigail McKnight (in Elias, P., A. McKnight, J. Pitcher, K. Purcell and C. Simm (1999). *Moving On: Graduate Careers Three Years After Graduation* – Short Report . Manchester: CSU.)

Building Links with Local Businesses

50. Both universities would like to work with partners to identify ways that local businesses / industries can influence students in their studies. UEL already has a work experience scheme that has been signed up to by approximately 90 mostly small, local employers. There is a coordinator who supports the scheme, which is designed to help raise the profile of UEL students and build links with local communities. This is a scheme that could be developed to strengthen links with more local businesses.

51. QMU is currently designing a pilot work experience project of their own to be run in the Autumn and are also in discussions with the East London Business Alliance as to how the university can strengthen its links with local employers further (this is discussed in further detail later in this report)

University Perspective on Graduate Unemployment as a local problem

52. Both universities believe that graduate unemployment / underemployment is a problem across the country. They do believe however, that it may impact more heavily on Tower Hamlets graduates as they have high aspirations, due to living in such proximity to the City and Canary Wharf. Tower Hamlets graduates are unique in many ways; many are second generation immigrants and the first in their families to go into higher education. They may lack the parental engagement and practical support that other graduates have and in many cases their English is not of a very high standard.

Recommendations

R4 The Task Group explores:

- **using Skillsmatch to develop volunteering or secondment opportunities for graduates to gain experience of working in local companies and organisations**
- **developing a mentoring scheme for local graduates.**

R5 The Task Group explores:

- **how to identify the key employment skills shortages now and in the future based on the likely development of the local labour market projected in the Tower Hamlets Regeneration Strategy**
- **the best means of improving the range and relevance of careers advice to the local labour market.**

F Engaging Local Employers

53. The East London Business Alliance (ELBA) seeks to increase the employment opportunities in the City and Canary Wharf for people living in Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham. ELBA assists employers to recruit locally to achieve both their business and corporate social responsibility objectives. They work closely with local job agencies and training providers to assist them in meeting the employment needs of the corporate sector and achieve their own objectives of reducing local unemployment. ELBA plays a full part in ensuring that local residents have the widest opportunities to achieve their full employment potential, including local graduates.

54. On Friday 23 March Sally Roberts, the ELBA Programme Director for Tower Hamlets met with officers to discuss the work ELBA is currently doing, and planning to do in the future with Tower Hamlets graduates.

55. At present ELBA runs the Community Affairs Trainee Scheme (CATS) graduate programme, which allows a number of local graduates each year to gain skills, knowledge and experience in corporate community involvement (CCI). The first year of the scheme (2005/6) saw ELBA members; Morgan Stanley, Credit Suisse, Canary Wharf Group, Allen and Overy, Marsh Insurance and Cameron McKenna create positions for the six graduates in their Community Affairs teams. The scheme provided the graduates with invaluable work experience and a platform from which to pursue a variety of careers, as well as an annual income of £15,000. Trainees spend 3 months at ELBA taking part in training and work experience, before being placed with a major company in the City or Canary Wharf for nine months.

56. During the scheme graduates acquire the following training opportunities and skills:

Understanding community needs.

- Introduction to the voluntary sector
- Good practice in employee volunteering
- Project assessment skills

Understanding corporate community involvement

- A day in the life of Community Affairs Manager
- Mapping the activities of CSR initiatives within companies

Understanding the private sector

- What is a business and how is a business run
- Introduction to the finance, legal and other key sectors.

Employability skills

- Confidence building and self-esteem
- Communicating effectively – spoken and written
- Business etiquette
- Basic administrative / IT skills (accredited).
- Time management and organisational skills
- Effective team work
- Presentational skills
- Project management

“Through participating in CATS, we have not only benefited from a very able extra pair of hands, but more importantly we’ve had live insight into our surrounding community. Working so closely with somebody that actually lives the issues has been an invaluable experience.” - Louise Ellison, Morgan Stanley

Maximising ELBA Membership Links

57. ELBA’s contact with its membership companies and local universities puts it in a unique position to be able to encourage the recruitment of local graduates into graduate level employment and ELBA is keen to ‘grow’ this area of their work. ELBA has stressed their commitment to providing more targeted support for local graduates at critical stages of their educational careers. More recently, ELBA has begun to work with Queen Mary University Career Services scoping the possibility of several projects:

ELBA Uniguides

58. ELBA Member companies would offer local 6th formers help and guidance with their UCAS applications, ensuring they consider properly what university they should apply for and which course. As a pilot, graduates will receive this support from Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank and Allen and Overy employees.

ELBA Undergraduate Network

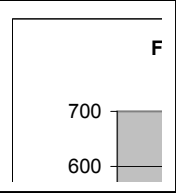
59. Over the course of this Scrutiny review, ELBA and Queen Mary University Careers Service have begun to scope the possibility of an ELBA Undergraduate Network, to be piloted with undergraduate students at Queen Mary University. Although currently at early discussion stage, the initial idea is to provide a range of networking opportunities to enable current QMU students to meet blue chip employers from the Borough. There may also be more structured activities on offer, such as practice interviews, guidance on making applications etc.
60. ELBA also plan to offer the following services to graduates through their membership companies:
- information about the local job opportunities available and how to secure them
 - advice on Graduate schemes and internships
 - advice and guidance on lateral recruitment opportunities at graduate level
 - help with on-line tests
 - working with agencies to support the recruitment of graduates
 - opportunities to gain networking and interview skills
 - advice on business etiquette and labour market demands
 - training opportunities; potentially Pitman's
 - funding for personal tutors at A level
 - access to a database of jobs (to be accessible once graduates has reached certain standard)
61. The network sessions would be delivered by HR personnel and graduate recruiters from ELBA member companies and would be held at the company offices to encourage familiarity with the environment of a large corporate company.

Recommendations:

- R6 The Task Group support and monitor the proposed East London Business Alliance (ELBA) and Queen Mary University Graduate Network pilot to increase the number of opportunities for local graduates to meet local employers and to consider how this can be extended across the borough.**
- R7 The Task Group develop further the links between schools, universities and employers by coordinating and facilitating careers workshops / advice sessions between all agencies.**

Conclusion

62. The Working Group welcomes the commitment of the Council and partners to supporting local graduates into employment but considers that more needs to be done to coordinate efforts to do this.
63. At a strategic level, the Council needs to help coordinate efforts aimed at reducing graduate unemployment, by providing the baseline information needed to frame any responses. This would also allow an assessment of the impact of initiatives.
64. There are good quality support services available to local graduates, but more needs to be done to make graduates aware of these services at an earlier stage in their academic careers. Much greater consideration needs to be given to 'employability' in school and university curricula.



Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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Agenda Item 9.3

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Overview and Scrutiny	1 May 2007	Unrestricted		
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): Alan Steward, Scrutiny Policy Manager		Title: Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2006/2007 Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary by Scrutiny Lead Members of their Overview and Scrutiny work during the civic year 2006/2007. It forms the basis of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report that will be reported to full Council and circulated more widely early in the new municipal year.

2. Recommendations

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the draft annual scrutiny report to Council
- 2.2 The Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree the final report before its submission to Council, after consultation with the Chair and relevant Scrutiny Leads.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

Annual Scrutiny Report File in Scrutiny Policy Team

Alan Steward
020 7364 4873

3 Report

- 3.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee co-ordinates all of the scrutiny activity within the Council. As well as the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, there are six Scrutiny Leads: one each for the five Community Plan themes, with a further Lead for health. Under the Council's Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny must submit an annual report of its work to Council. This is attached as a draft at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The Annual Report outlines the work both of the Committee and of the Scrutiny Leads and their working groups over the last year. This highlights the constructive policy development role that scrutiny undertakes through its reviews. It also outlines the ongoing progress that has been made in embedding overview and scrutiny within the Council. Pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports continues to encourage greater debate around key issues, while call-ins have been debated in a robust and rigorous manner at Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The majority of the work programme agreed at the start of the year has been delivered.
- 3.3 A number of the review reports are entering their final stages. This includes the Scrutiny Review of Access to Hostels and Sustainable Communities, and reports of the Materplanning and NRF Employment Schemes Challenge Sessions. These will be presented to the June meeting but included within the Annual Report to Council.
- 3.4 The Annual Scrutiny report will be submitted to the first full meeting of Council in the new Municipal Year (20 June 2007). Following the report to Council, it will be circulated widely within the Council and across partners. A summary article will also be placed in Eastend Life.

4 Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

- 4.1 Article 6.03 (d) of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must report annually to full Council on its work. The report submitted to Council following this consideration will fulfil that obligation.

5 Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 Equal Opportunity Implications

- 6.1 Equal opportunities are central to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A number of reports and reviews have specific equalities themes including access to hostels and graduate unemployment.

7 Anti Poverty Implications

- 7.1 Anti-poverty is central to some aspects of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee particularly work within Creating and Sharing Prosperity and the such as that on Planning Obligations.

8 Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

- 8.1 The Sustainable Communities review with its focus on recycling would contribute toward improving a greener environment.

9 Risk Management

- 9.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

Appendix 1 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report to Council

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council
May 2007**



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Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

Overview and Scrutiny looks at how the Council and its partners deliver services so that they meet local needs and contribute to the overall vision in the borough's Community Plan. It also monitors the decisions made by the Council's Cabinet to make sure that they are robust and provide good value for money.

Overview and Scrutiny also has powers to review and scrutinise local health services and make recommendations to NHS bodies. It can also consider other issues of concern to local people, including services provided by other organisations. It then advises the Cabinet, Council and sometimes other partners, on how their policies and services can be improved.

Membership

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee coordinates all Overview and Scrutiny work. It has nine councillors reflecting the overall political balance of the Council during 2006/07. There are five Labour councillors, two Respect councillors, one Liberal Democrat councillor and one Conservative councillor.

As well as the councillors, there are five other people who sit on the Committee. They have specific responsibilities for education. There are two representatives appointed by the Anglican and Roman Catholic Dioceses. There are also two parent governors. Each of these representatives can contribute to any matters discussed by the Committee but they can only vote on education issues. The final member is a non-voting representative of the Muslim community for education issues. The decision to have this position was a local one in recognition of the large Muslim community in the borough.

Scrutiny Chair and Leads

The Chair of the Committee in 2006/07 was Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman. The Chair oversees the work programme of the committee as well as taking a lead on monitoring the Council's budget.

There are six 'scrutiny leads': one for each of the themes in the Tower Hamlets Community Plan, with a further lead on health issues. The Scrutiny Leads were:

- Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar (Labour) for "living well" focusing on improving housing and social care and Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr Shiria Khatun (Labour) for "creating and sharing prosperity" focusing on bringing investment into the borough and ensuring residents and businesses benefit from growing economic prosperity
- Cllr Stephanie Eaton (Liberal Democrat) for "learning, achievement and leisure" focusing on raising educational aspirations, expectations and achievement, providing a wide range of arts and leisure, and celebrating the diversity of the community
- Cllr Simon Rouse (Conservative) for "excellent public services" focusing on improving public services to make sure they represent good value for money and meet local needs
- Cllr Mohammed Abdus Salique (Labour) for "health" focusing on improving local health services and the co-ordination of different health service providers within the borough
- Cllr Clair Hawkins (Labour) for "living safely" focusing on reducing crime, making people feel safer and creating a more secure and cleaner environment

The Scrutiny Leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders. They also pick up any relevant issues on behalf of the Committee as a whole and led the working groups within their theme.

What does Overview and Scrutiny do?

The Committee:

- looks at how the Council is performing by monitoring key strategies and plans
- looks at the Council's budget and how it uses its resources
- sets up time-limited working groups to look at issues in depth and make proposals for change. Suggestions for topics may come from elected Members, full Council, the Cabinet or from local organisations and residents.
- considers decisions made by the Cabinet that are 'called in'. This happens if there is concern about the decision or what information was considered
- reviews briefly the reports that are going to Cabinet for decision and raises any concerns.

Because the Committee has such a broad responsibility, it focuses on a number of key priorities each year. These make up an annual work programme for each of the Scrutiny Leads. For each area there is usually one in-depth review, as well as a number of shorter pieces of work.

Health Scrutiny

The Government has given local councils specific responsibilities to scrutinise health services. The Health Scrutiny Panel was set up to do this and can look at any matter about health services within the borough including hospital and GP services, health promotion and prevention. This includes the way that health services are planned, how services are provided and how NHS organisations consult with local people.

Under the Healthcare Commission's new Annual Healthcheck for all NHS trusts, the Health Scrutiny Panel can comment on local Trust's declarations against 24 Core Standards. These cover seven areas: safety, clinical and cost effectiveness, governance, patient focus, accessible and responsive care, care environment and amenities and public health. There is also a duty on local health services to consult with the Health Scrutiny Panel if they are making substantial changes to services.

Annual Report

This report provides a brief summary of the work of Overview and Scrutiny in 2006/07. Each member of the Committee outlines the work that they have undertaken both in the reviews that they have led and also their work on the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman, Chair

This is the third year since we changed our arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets. Our arrangements include:

- a single co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- five Scrutiny Leads scrutinising the Community Plan themes and one for Health matters
- pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports
- performance monitoring by considering the Tower Hamlets Index, Strategic Plan and Equalities Action Plan.
- a more robust call-in procedure

We agreed a challenging work programme in August 2006 and I believe we have delivered on the majority of it. Over the year, we monitored our progress to make sure we remained on track to complete our work.

This year, we have improved significantly the engagement with Lead Members at Committee. They have presented the majority of reports within their portfolio that the Committee considered, as well as responding to call-ins. I think this is really important in making sure we hold the Executive to account and encouraging more discussion and debate among councillors.

Performance Monitoring

We monitor the Tower Hamlets Index (THI) every two months and twice a year the Council's Strategic Plan and Equalities Action Plan. We are the only formal councillor forum that does this and it's important in making sure that our services perform well. I believe this worked effectively and helped Overview and Scrutiny understand and comment on the wider performance of services: a key part of improving the quality of life of local people.

We also had five Scrutiny Spotlights based around the Community Plan themes where Lead Members discussed the performance and main challenges facing their services.

We also considered the Council's annual Corporate Complaints report and an update on the Members' Enquiries system. All councillors were pleased to see the improved performance in responding to both complaints and Members' enquiries. Councillors represent local people and getting quick and full responses is an essential part to their work.

Policy Framework

Within the Council's Policy and Budget Framework there are a number of key policy documents that set out how the Council will act. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider these before Council agrees them. We discussed the following Policy documents this year:

- **Local Development Framework**
The Committee welcomed and endorsed the contents of the Local Development Framework. We felt that amenity land, including play areas/spaces for children and green spaces should be protected and not lost in any future developments. We also wanted to make sure that car free developments did not disadvantage social market tenants and that social infrastructure should be put in place before new development schemes are built.

- **Gambling Policy**
The Committee welcomed and supported the proposed Gambling Policy. We recognised that it may result in increased demand on the enforcement teams and we wanted to make sure this was monitored.
- **Tower Hamlets and City of London Youth Justice Plan 2005/06**
We welcomed the Youth Justice Plan but sought assurances that where young people were placed in secure accommodation, particularly outside of the borough, that this was of good quality. The Committee also wanted to see more indication in the plan of the challenges that services faced in improving youth justice and the lessons learnt from one year to the next.

Ocean New Deal for Communities

Cabinet also requested that the urgent report on the new approach to the Ocean New Deal for Communities came to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its comments. The Committee supported the approach but felt that it was important that the Council communicated the reasons for the urgency and undertook significant and detailed consultation and involvement with local people and businesses.

Scrutiny of the Budget

We considered the Council's budget at two of our meetings this year.

In August we considered the Financial Outlook report and supported the Council's approach. We have good and stable financial management within the Council but felt three areas needed development:

1. taking a corporate - rather than directorate - view on prioritising services for efficiencies or growth
2. providing training and development opportunities for councillors around the changing local government finance
3. continuing to develop and refine our planning for the future, especially medium term financial planning and around reserves and contingencies

In February, we considered Cabinet's budget proposals for 2006/07. There was discussion about the use of consultants, efficiencies, the level of reserves and consultation over the budget. Members also wanted an early discussion next year on the part that Overview and Scrutiny Committee can play in ensuring the robustness of the budget. We were reassured that this would happen by the Lead Member, Resources and Performance.

Pre-decision scrutiny

We can submit issues of concern to Cabinet before it takes a decision. I feel we have strengthened this over the year and commented on 41 Cabinet reports (compared to 23 last year). This included the reports on:

- Proposed Drinking Control Zones
- Rich Mix Cultural Centre
- Priorities and Arrangements for Mainstream Grants
- Various contracts including Youth Services, Landscape Maintenance and material Recycling Facility.
- Corporate Revenue Budget
- Masterplans in Aldgate, Bromley-by-Bow and Whitechapel
- Housing Investment Strategy

Although our questions and concerns have not changed a Cabinet decision, they have provided further information and clarified the reasons for the decisions. The responses also inform councillors' decisions over call-ins.

Call-ins

The Committee has considered nineteen call-ins this year. This is a substantial increase from the eight in 2005/06 and, in part, reflects the new political makeup of the Council following the elections in May 2006. The call-ins considered by the Committee were:

Report Called-in	O&S Decision
Disposal of Cheviot House	Referred back to Cabinet
LIFT Development and Outline Business Case for Southern Grove and St.Clements	Confirmed
Disposal of Holland Estate	Confirmed
Award of Youth Service Contracts 2006	Confirmed
Disposal of Bow Bridge and Rainhill Way and Devons Estates to Poplar HARCA	Referred back to Cabinet
Reorganisation of the Council's Directorate and Senior Management Structure	Confirmed
Clays Lane - Re-housing	Confirmed
Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Outline Business Case (OBC) and Local Education Partnership (LEP)	Confirmed
Disposal of 723 Commercial Road and 2-22 Lowell Street, E14 - Part 2 Report	Confirmed
Commissioning Extra Care for Older People with Dementia	Referred back to Cabinet
The Future of Short Life Properties owned by the Council	Referred back to Cabinet
Award Of Vehicle Removals Contract For Public Highway And Estate Parking Enforcement	Referred back to Cabinet
East End Life Development Options	Confirmed
Review of Parking Services' Fees and Charges	Referred back to Cabinet
Housing Investment Strategy	Referred back to Cabinet
Disposal of Poplar Baths	Confirmed
Disposal of land at Railway Arms	Confirmed
Disposal of land at British Prince Public House	Confirmed
Disposal of land at 34 Linford Drive, Basildon	Confirmed

The consideration of the call-ins were robust and rigorous with considerable debate between Members on some issues. We confirmed twelve decisions although on a number of these the Lead Members gave assurances that they would take some of the concerns raised onboard. We asked Cabinet to reconsider the other seven. Although Cabinet reconfirmed its decision on all of the call-ins, they did take account of our comments and concerns. For example, on the Review of Parking Services Fees and Charges, Cabinet agreed to maintain free parking permits for Over 60s.

It is also worth highlighting that because of the items called in, attendance by local people and other councillors has increased substantially at the Committee meetings. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny and highlight the important role it has within the Council.

Co-opted and Appointed Representatives

It was a difficult year for the Committee's co-opted and appointed representatives. Following the resignation of the previous two Parent-Governor representatives, we sought nominations for the two places. Unfortunately this did not proceed as planned and we are looking to promote the positions among parent-governors to make sure that in 2007/08 we have these positions filled.

One of the two co-opted representatives also resigned and after some delay we have secured a further representative. We will work next year to make sure that the co-opted and appointed representatives are engaged fully in the work of the Committee again.

Raising the Profile

We continue to improve how and when we communicate with Members, Officers and the public. We used the weekly Members Bulletin to keep members up to date with the work of the Committee, Health Scrutiny Panel and scrutiny reviews. The Manager's Briefing and the staff newsletter, Pulling Together, were also used to promote scrutiny work, so that council officers are well informed about the scrutiny work programme, upcoming reviews, review findings, and how they can assist.

We also used the Council's newspaper Eastend Life, and our Scrutiny web pages so that Tower Hamlets residents know of the work scrutiny was undertaking. There were a number of the reviews that attracted significant interest from local people including the work around leaseholders and graduate unemployment. There are more details of these in the report back by each Scrutiny Lead.

The Scrutiny review from 2005/06 - 'A Partnership for Success: the role of Ward Councillors in the Tower Hamlets Partnership' - was recognised as an example of good practice by the Local Government Information Unit / Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). They highlighted its quality and recommended it to other councils. In addition, they felt that the review could help shape thinking about how to respond to the issues arising from the Local Government White Paper. We used this to inform the Council's response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry into the future role of councillors.

Checking our own progress

Twice a year we monitor the recommendations we have made, not just those at committee but also those from our reviews and other investigations. Services are asked to provide an update so we can see whether progress is being made. The latest monitoring indicates that nearly all of our recommendations since July 2004 are being acted on or achieved. We are planning to hold a challenge session on one or two of our reviews next year to consider their impact in more detail. This will also help us learn any lessons about undertaking reviews and making recommendations.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe scrutiny has made considerable progress this year. In particular, having Lead Members attend the Committee to present reports and outline the reasons for decisions has significantly enhanced the role and value of scrutiny. We are holding the Executive to account - particularly around performance monitoring and through considering call-ins - and influencing Cabinet decisions. The reviews have also made an important contribution to picking up local people's concerns - for example, around leaseholder services, recycling and consultation - and worked with partners, officers and other councillors to improve services.

The importance of Scrutiny is increasing with the Government proposals to extend Scrutiny's powers with "a community call for action" around anti-social behaviour. They are also proposing to extend the role of scrutiny around health consultation and working with Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) to monitor and implement Local Area Agreements (LAA). This is an exciting time to be part of Scrutiny and I am sure it will strengthen further over the next year.

Living Well

Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar, Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Living Well covers Social Services and Housing, both of which impact on many people in Tower Hamlets including some of our most vulnerable residents.

Choice Based Lettings Scheme

I held a number of meetings with the Director of Housing Management to look at the Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme. A large number of our Member enquiries relate to this scheme. With increasing demand and reducing supply this is becoming more of an issue for local residents and it is therefore important that the policy is both fair and yet efficient. We looked at a number of different case studies which highlighted the challenges facing our Housing Department and also the overcrowded and difficult conditions our residents are living in. We agreed that a Seminar will be organised for Councillors on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme especially due to the large number of new Councillors that were elected this year. I feel this is an issue that needs to be reviewed regularly.

Scrutiny Review of Hostels Strategy

The Council have recently drafted a Hostels and Move-On Strategy which outlines our commitment to improve and co-ordinate the hostel sector. Our aim for this review was to consider how we can improve access to hostels for local residents. We began the review with a number of visits to different hostels within the borough which provided us with an opportunity to meet hostel users and staff. We held a meeting with the Supporting Peoples Team and the Housing and Homeless Advice Team to understand how the strategy was developed and the work being undertaken to improve this sector. We also held a meeting with service providers and referral agencies to find out some of the key issues facing them when dealing with users and the local authority.

The review concluded that the Hostel Sector plays an important part in providing support for one of the most vulnerable community in the borough. The Hostel Strategy provides an opportunity to improve the quality of our hostels and manage this sector. The support of service providers is an important element in driving forward this strategy. Consultation with service providers and users in drafting this strategy has received good support from both groups. Based on issues raised by users and service providers the Working Group are considering the key recommendations and a report will be submitted to Cabinet in the summer.

Conclusion

The Living Well theme is an important one as it includes many of the most vulnerable people in our communities. My work has shown that we have many excellent services, provided by the Council and its partners, that are working with local people to provide care and support that improves the quality of their life.

Creating and Sharing Prosperity **Cllr Shiria Khatun**

Tower Hamlets is developing at an extraordinary pace. Physically, our borough is growing to accommodate new industries and businesses in Canary Wharf, and lots of work is being done to prepare Tower Hamlets for the Olympics and the potential for Crossrail. At the same time our population continues to grow and diversify. Such large scale growth and development will create lots of opportunities for local people, particularly those employment-related. But managing such growth and development also brings challenges. As Scrutiny Lead for Creating and Sharing Prosperity, I wanted to focus my work programme on the way that local communities are involved in influencing the development in the borough, to ensure that local communities are beneficiaries of all the development in our borough.

Masterplanning Consultation

When deciding on my work programme for 2006/7 I met with the Director of Development and Renewal to scope out the Directorate's key priorities for the coming year. It struck me that the Council's emerging Local Development Framework would provide plenty of scope to look at how local people are able to influence major planning decisions made in the borough.

After meeting with Officers from the Major Projects Planning Team, I found out that the first phase of Masterplan development in the borough was due to commence shortly, and so I decided to focus my main scrutiny review work of the year on looking at how the community were engaged in the process. Over the course of the review, myself and working group members met 3 times with Planners and Officers from the Council's Consultation and Involvement Team to receive updates on the Masterplan development process. We attended consultation events in both the non-statutory and statutory consultation periods, to see how the consultation element of masterplanning was designed and delivered, and most importantly, how local affectively local residents were able to feed into the development of the masterplans.

This review work was instrumental in ensuring that a good practice consultation framework was developed, which built on the learning points. This will be instrumental in informing all future phases of masterplan consultation in the borough over the coming years.

Cross-Borough Scrutiny

As this was my first year as a Scrutiny Lead I was interested to know more about how other Councillors in similar roles at neighbouring boroughs have influenced services through their scrutiny work. In September 2006 I met with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny at the London Borough of Newham. It was invaluable for me to hear about the reviews he has chaired in Newham, and how he has built such strong relationships with Cabinet Members. One of the main issues we discussed was the Olympics and the importance of established an Olympic legacy for our local residents. We agreed that the Olympics provide an obvious opportunity for valuable cross-borough scrutiny and I hope that this is taken forward in 2007/8.

NRF Employment Schemes

When developing my work programme for 2006/7 I wanted to look at issues that are of particular concern to local people. From the 2005/6 Annual Resident's Survey one of the key concerns is a perceived lack of jobs. I wanted to look at this further and after discussion with Development and Renewal Directorate, discovered that the employment aspects of the Council's Regeneration Strategy were to be delivered through NRF funds in 2006/07 with an evaluation of the employment schemes required at the end of the municipal year. I therefore organised a challenge session in April 2007, to assess the effectiveness of the schemes and draw lessons for improvement in delivering NRF employment programmes in the future.

[Outcomes to be added following session on 17 April].

Conclusion

As Scrutiny Lead for Creating and Sharing Prosperity, I think we have looked at a very significant local issue in the Masterplanning Consultation review. The interest and input the working group put into the first phase of masterplan developments has helped to ensure that Officers in our Planning Service forged strong working relationships with Officers in the Council's Consultation and Involvement Team, to the benefit of local people. The Service has increased their knowledge of the value of consultation, and the importance of following good practice consultation principles. This will ensure that future masterplanning phases continue to involve local people, giving them the opportunity to influence local decision making that impacts so heavily on their lives.

Excellent Public Services **Cllr Simon Rouse**

This is one of the broadest portfolios as it covers all aspects of Council services.

Leaseholders and Customer Care

This year, I wanted to focus on the customer service that the Council offers to leaseholders. This has been an issue for a number of years and makes up a large part of councillor's caseload. I also wanted to use this as a case study more widely to test the Council's general approach to customer care.

Leaseholder management now makes up a large proportion of the Council's housing services portfolio, with around 38.6% of the customers being leaseholders. The review consisted of three main areas looking at the different services and initiatives that the Council provides to leaseholders including service charges, estate cleaning and major works. We held a number of sessions with the Housing service, a meeting with The Tower hamlets Leaseholders Association and focus groups with leaseholders from the borough-wide Compact and recruited through East End Life. I also thought it was important that we looked to learn how other councils deal with their leaseholders, so we had a fact-finding mission to Westminster Council, a top-performing council in providing services to leaseholders.

The review has just reported and identified a number of areas for action including:

- improving communication and engagement with leaseholders
- streamlining and simplifying the complaints procedure
- improving the information given in service charges
- improving the range of leaseholder services provided at Local Housing Office
- improving the advice and support for leaseholders, particularly around the major works

Disability Equality Scheme

I also chaired a Scrutiny Challenge session about the Disability Equality Scheme: a new duty on the Council to promote equality for disabled people. Our session considered the main responsibilities on the Council and how it was working to make sure it complied with legislation including involving disabled people in the development of the Scheme. A key suggestion from the session was that the need to support councillors to help promote disability equality with their constituents. I am pleased to report that following the session, a training session was held for all councillors in February 2007 to help promote the Duty and Scheme. This was then followed up with a leaflet to all councillors.

I also asked for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider a delegated decision around the use of consultants. This was useful in informing the proposed scrutiny review in 2007/08 that will look at how the Council manages its use of consultants.

Conclusion

As Scrutiny Lead for Excellent Public Services, I think we have looked at two important issues for the Council and local people. I hope that the work and recommendations from the leaseholders review will help improve both services and the relationship with leaseholders.

Health

Cllr Mohammed Abdus Salique

The Health Scrutiny Panel undertakes the Council's functions under the Health and Social Care Act, 2001. As well as the councillors, the Panel co-opted representatives from the local PPI Forums to help promote partnership working and I would like to thank Mrs Kathleen Banks from the Barts and The London Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Forum, Mr Nuruz Jaman from the Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust PPI Forum and Mr John Lee from the East London and the City Mental Health Trust PPI Forum for their contributions.

Health Scrutiny Panel Work Programme

From our induction sessions the Panel has developed a two year work programme that consists of briefings, reports, service visits and an annual review of a specific issue.

We have adopted health inequality as a key theme that reflects the longer-term health challenges facing the borough. We want to contribute towards this through work around health promotion and prevention, integration and partnership and access to services. Alongside these, we identified three specific health issues as priorities for the borough: smoking, heart disease and mental health.

The Panel undertook two service visits this year. At Barts and the London NHS Trust at Whitechapel Hospital we looked at the development of the new hospital. We also visited East London and the City Mental Trust at St Clements Hospital to look at the facilities prior to their move to Mile End Hospital. Both these visits were useful in developing the Panel's relationship with the Trusts.

The Panel have also been involved in the consultation for Foundation Trust by both Barts and the London NHS Trust and East London and the City Mental Health Trust. We hosted a lively joint meeting with Hackney, Newham and City of London Corporation to consider the East London and the City Mental Health Trust application. The Panel have welcomed both applications but recommended that the Trusts ensure the membership reflect the local community. At the joint meeting we also considered the cuts made to East London health

trust budgets by NHS London and sent a joint letter to the Secretary of State for Health outlining our concerns.

We have also considered a number of consultation reports from Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust which included their commissioning intentions, maternity services review and development of St Pauls Way Health Centre.

We have been working closely with the PPI Forums and our health partners in the development of Local Involvement Networks which will provide further opportunities to consult and involve local people in the development of health services.

Access to GP and Dentistry Services

Our major work this year was to look at access to GP and Dentistry Services. The Review Group held a meeting with the Primary Care Trust to find out what strategies and policies they have put in place to improve access. Following this, Members made visits to a GP (Stepney Medical Practice), a Dentist (Dr Verma Dental Practice) and the Mobile Dental Unit. We have also held a meeting with some community organisations and Patient and Public Involvement Forum Members to seek their views about issues local residents have raised with them about access. We went to a meeting of the Tower Hamlets Access Group to get their views on accessing primary care services.

Our headline findings are that:

- there needs to be better information for residents about accessing primary care services;
- much greater work needs to be undertaken on patient education;
- long term sustainable funding for initiatives such as extended opening, mobile dental unit hours is vital.

Our recommendations are being developed and will be submitted to Cabinet and NHS partners in the summer.

The Annual Healthcheck

The Panel now has an important role in commenting on the local NHS trust declarations to the Healthcare Commission against 24 Core Standards. These cover seven areas: safety, clinical and cost effectiveness, governance, patient focus, accessible and responsive care, care environment and amenities and public health. The Panel met with Barts and the London NHS Trust and Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust to consider their draft declarations in March 2007. We also held a joint meeting with Hackney, Newham and City of London Corporation to consider the draft declarations of the East London and the City Mental Health Trust I am glad to report that all the trusts declared that they were compliant with all 24 Core Standards.

We raised issues around access to services, Halal food for patients and NHS leaflets which were being translated into community languages. Our comments have been welcomed by the Trusts and will be sent to the Health Care Commission to consider as part of the Trusts' submissions.

Conclusion

It has been another positive year for the Health Scrutiny Panel. Not only have we developed a two year work programme we have conducted an ambitious review and responded flexibly to the major demands of the Annual Healthcheck process. We have developed good working relationships with local health trusts and will continue to encourage them to be transparent and accountable to local people in the future.

Learning Achievement and Leisure

Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton

As Scrutiny Lead for Learning Achievement and Leisure, my remit covers many Council areas, including play services, schools, lifelong learning, sports opportunities and access to the arts. I wanted to focus on higher education and in ensuring that young people in Tower Hamlets are given the encouragement and support they need so that they consider higher education as a life choice, and prosper in subsequent careers.

Graduate Unemployment

More and more local young people are entering higher education every year but I was increasingly hearing claims that our local graduates face a disproportionate difficulty in accessing employment and training opportunities and as a borough with Canary Wharf and the City on our doorstep, this concerned me. I therefore decided to focus the review on the issues that arise when graduates attempt to make the transition from education to employment.

The Panel met with various Council services, representatives from local university career advice services, a local voluntary sector support provider and a representative from the borough's business group. We also held a focus group with local graduates. By inviting all these people to take part in the review, we were able to obtain a number of different perspectives, which were invaluable in helping us to agree final recommendations.

The key recommendation to come out of the review is to acquiring baseline data on graduate unemployment. This information does not exist but it is essential to inform future action. We also recommended a task group was established to champion graduates and their access to work, determining skills shortages in the borough, supporting students in acquiring work experience and key skills and encouraging better coordination and sign posting between existing support services.

Educational Attainment of Children in Care

[To be added depending on outcome of session]

Conclusion

I was pleased to be able to meet many people who are dedicated and committed to supporting local young people into education, and to building their aspirations. I'm hopeful that the work we've done on the graduate unemployment review, particularly on bringing different agencies together, will result in better and coordinated services for local graduates.

The issue of recycling and waste management is a key challenge for the borough so it has been reflected in my work area this year. As the Council is preparing its new recycling contract this was to be the focus of the review.

Recycling

The lead in time to the new recycling contract provided the opportunity for members to engage in a programme of activities to increase their understanding of recycling and waste management so that they could provide a critical friend challenge to the proposed new contract.

As part of this we met with environment volunteers that are taking the sustainability/recycling message into local communities. The Working Group attended the meeting to have a short session with the Volunteers and hear about their experiences of promoting environmentally friendly measures, particularly around recycling and cleaner streets and open spaces. This highlighted some of the barriers to recycling including space for recycling materials was limited in flats and on walkways and that weekly recycling collections felt to be too long. This is particularly a problem where space is at a premium.

Our second visit consisted of two parts: a tour of recycling collections - low rise properties, high rise communal and door to door, followed by a visit to Grosvenor Resource Management Ltd's Material Recovery Facility (MRF). We also received a presentation by John Palmer, Service head, Street Scene, setting out the main priorities around recycling, current performance and future targets. The Scrutiny Working Group was accompanied by a camera crew who were developing a CD, trying to raise awareness of recycling, particularly among BME communities.

The visit to Northumberland Wharf highlighted the scale of the recycling issue. Whilst 2000 tonnes of residual waste arrived on wagons every week, the main recycling centre for the borough received 234 tonnes for the month. The tour of recycling collections indicated the issues around the new developments and difficulty in accessibility, while the visit to the material recovery facility showed the importance of educating people on recycling the correct materials.

The improved understanding of recycling and waste management will be used by the review group in the challenge session of the new recycling contract taking place on the 24th April.

[to be updated following the session with key recommendations]

Conclusion

Recycling and waste management is an issue that affects all residents and an area where the performance of the Council is not yet satisfactory, although improvements have been made. Tackling this issue and contributing to the new recycling contract are both positive steps and help members in their role as advocates of recycling. Overall, I think we have made good progress and I particularly hope that the Council and its partners can improve further their recycling services.

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

If you want to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets, please contact the Scrutiny Policy Team:

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