

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2008

**ROOM M71, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Asad (Chair)
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor A A Sardar

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Lutfur Rahman
Councillor Abdal Ullah

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr H Mueenuddin – Muslim Community Representative

Officers Present:

Lutfur Ali – (Assistant Chief Executive)
Andy Bamber – (Service Head Community Safety, Communities
Localities and Culture)
Suki Binjal – (Interim Head of Legal Services - Community,
Chief Executive's)
Stephen Halsey – (Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and
Culture)
Afazul Hoque – (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny and
Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Michael Keating – (Service Head Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief
Executive's)
Chris Naylor – (Corporate Director, Resources)
Alan Steward – (Acting Service Head, Strategy and Performance,
Chief Executive's)
Jebin Syeda – (Scrutiny Policy Officer, Scrutiny and Equalities,
Chief Executive's)
Amanda Thompson – (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Waiseul Islam, Shiria Khatun and Bill Turner.

Councillor Josh Peck, Lead Member for Performance and Resources, who was due to present the Tower Hamlets Index item, also gave his apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None received.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no decisions 'called in' from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 30 July 2008.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT: LEAD MEMBER

Councillor Abdal Ullah, Lead Member for Cleaner, Greener, Safer, gave a presentation on the key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from his portfolio. Also present to respond to questions was the Borough Commander, Paul Rickett, and Steve Bending, Met Police.

Councillor Ullah advised that crime remained the greatest concern for residents, and although it remained around the London average, concern about crime had increased over the past two years and so there was still more challenging work to do.

Councillor Ullah referred to the Crime and Drugs Reduction Partnership Plan 2008-20 which was due to be considered later on the agenda, and advised that this strategy had been developed with the involvement of a wide range of partners and aimed to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and drug misuse.

The priorities for 2008/09 had been agreed by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership following consultation with the community.

Litter was the second most important issue of concern for residents, and again although this was in line with the London average, there had been an increase over the last year. Councillor Ullah reported on a number of initiatives that were being implemented to address environmental cleanliness, including 'hot spot action teams', street cleansing contract monitoring, and a recycling improvement plan.

Members of the Committee asked questions on a number of related issues including crime reduction targets and performance, information sharing between partners, the introduction of Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) and female safety.

Councillor Ullah and the Borough Commander then responded in detail to the concerns raised.

The Committee noted that 64% of key targets had been successfully achieved, a new information sharing database was about to go live, and the role of the THEOs was to be proactive in preventing crime and identifying problems before they escalated. Gender based violence was also a priority across the whole of the Metropolitan Police Service, and barriers within the criminal justice system were being addressed.

The Chair thanked Councillor Ullah for his presentation, and the Borough Commander for attending.

8. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ISSUES

8.1 Crime and Drugs Reduction Partnership Plan 2008-2011

Andy Bamber, Head of Community Safety, presented the draft Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Plan 2008-11 which formed part of the Budget and Policy framework for the Council under the Council's Constitution.

The Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006 now required the plan to include priorities arising from the Strategic Assessment, a performance management framework, a delivery plan (including partners' contributions and how they will be resourced), and details of how the views of the community will be incorporated.

Arising from the question and answer session that followed, the Committee

RESOLVED

That the following comments be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration:

The Committee broadly welcome the Plan which highlights the priorities for the Council and its partners in tackling and preventing crime within the Borough. The Committee noted that crime still remains a major concern for local residents in the Annual Residents' Survey. Members of the Committee commented that in line with the Community Plan theme of 'One Tower Hamlets', this strategy should refer to the needs of the whole community rather than individual communities as stated on page 4 of the current plan. Concerns were also raised regarding the limited consultation undertaken, as the views of residents are vital to ensure the Plan reflects the needs of the community.

The importance of up-to-date data was also highlighted when setting appropriate and ambitious targets. Members also felt that a resident satisfaction survey of the police similar to the Annual Residents' Survey would be useful to help set appropriate targets for this plan. Members were assured that targets set were realistic and based on a number of local considerations.

Members commented that one of the key targets relating to drug treatment should be the number of people that have been successfully treated as this gives a clear indication of how many people have been helped to move away from substance misuse.

The Committee welcomed the initiative to localise services through 'high visibility services' by the Communities, Localities and Culture Directorate. The media hype around certain crimes has created a perception amongst local residents that crime is higher in their neighbourhood than the actual figures indicate. The high visibility initiative is designed to reduce some of those anxieties.

The Committee ask that consideration be given to the funding for the Tower Hamlets Environmental Officers (THEOs), and recommend that local residents are involved in setting their priorities and work programme. It was also suggested that the strategy should address women's safety separately as they are particularly vulnerable.

9. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

9.1 Tower Hamlets Index

Chris Naylor, Corporate Director of Resources, presented the first quarterly monitoring report for the new Tower Hamlets Index covering the period April-June 2008. Members noted that so far performance was in line with expectations.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Naylor advised that if inflation continued to rise as it was then this could be contained, however if

there was a recession it would be more difficult to assess how the Council's services would be affected. However Treasury Management had performed better than expected.

The overspend in facilities had been brought on by the increase in fuel prices, work programmes being brought forward, and land disposals which still hadn't taken place.

Mr Naylor agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Anne Jackson's question concerning the safeguarding of the Council's investments.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

10. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

10.1 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

Mr Michael Keating, Service Head Scrutiny and Equalities, introduced the work programme for the municipal year 2008/2009.

The Chair **MOVED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the work programme be finalised by the Service Head Scrutiny and Equalities after consultation with the Chair.

10.2 Verbal Updates from Scrutiny Leads

Scrutiny Lead members reported on progress within their respective Scrutiny areas:

Councillor Ann Jackson (One Tower Hamlets) reported that the draft scoping report for her review on child poverty would be sent out to all the stakeholders for comments very soon.

She was also keen for the Working Group Members to assist in undertaking intensive research on child poverty, including case-study interviews and a number of focus groups with local residents to talk about their personal experiences.

The first review session which had originally been scheduled for 18 September 2008 had now been cancelled, however rescheduled dates would be put in draft scoping report before it went out. Some nominations for the Membership of the Working Group had also been received.

Councillor A A Sardar (Prosperous Community) reported that he had agreed to scrutinise parental involvement in secondary education, and had met with Helen Jenner (Service Head – Early Years Children and Learning) and Sarah Gale (Head of Equalities and Parental Engagement) in order to discuss the review timetable and some of the witnesses that would be called. A scoping report was being drafted and would shortly be circulated.

The Working Group hoped to visit secondary schools and hold focus groups with parents, governors, head teachers and staff about how they are improving parental involvement. Visits to specialist groups, such as the Parent Information Point session, were also planned.

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

The Chair MOVED and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the following pre-decision questions be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:

Agenda Item 7.1 Resourcing Youth Services (CAB 038/089)

1. The report does not give a proper reason and justification why the services for LAPs 1, 2 and 3 should be tendered rather than retained in-house. Can the Cabinet ensure that the tendering will deliver results?
2. As it is not mentioned in the report, how have the recommendations of the Scrutiny Challenge Session held last year which revisited the Youth Services Review undertaken in 2004/05 been incorporated into the new service delivery?
3. How will the needs of disabled children be addressed by this report?

Agenda Item 7.2 33-37 The Oval & Bethnal Green Gasholders Site, E3 (CAB 039/089)

1. What is the feasibility of this site being used to provide a cemetery in the borough?
2. When were the HSE Criteria (article 10) updated, and does this change affect any other sites within LBTH? How does the planning department

now ensure all checks are made in relation to planning requests? Is there a revised sign off on development reviews prior to case approval?

3. In paragraph 5.4 it can be inferred that the developer could have deliberately withdrawn the application in order to get to the current situation wherein they stand to gain possibly more money from the Council. Does the Council itself have any recourse against the developer in this?
4. Has the Council considered identification of another site for this development that could be recommended instead to possibly allow the developer to recoup losses and also save Council funds?

Agenda Item 10.1 Working Neighbourhoods Fund Proposed Interventions (CAB 042/089)

1. Can the Cabinet confirm that all the organisations mentioned in the report have applied for the grant and not been chosen simply because of their previous work? Can the Cabinet ensure that funding from WNF is equally available for all community organisations?

Agenda Item 12.5 Corporate Revenue Budget Monitoring 2008/09 – First Report – Housing Revenue Account (CAB 048/089)

1. There seems to be a higher rental income due to fewer tenants transferring to RSLs and lower leaseholder charges due to higher leaseholder transfers than expected? What is the explanation for this?

Agenda Item 12.6 Treasury Management Outturn Report 2007/08 (CAB 049/089)

1. Given concern about the adverse impact of the 'credit crunch' on financial institutions which have previously perform well, what measures have been taken to choose an investment management company which can safeguard the Council against the current US problems as much as possible?

12. 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.

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

The Chair MOVED and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the following section pre-decision question be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:

Agenda Item 17.2 Roman Place (2 Gladstone Place) – Granting of Development Lease (CAB 052/089)

This is a very sensitive development and any perceived adverse changes allowed now could further harm local perception. Therefore, could the Cabinet outline how they will inform and consult the local community about this proposed change?

The meeting finished at
6.50pm.

Councillor Abdul Asad, Chair