

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2009

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

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Asad (Chair)
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor David Snowdon
Councillor Bill Turner (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Peter Golds (Deputising for Councillor Ahmed Hussain)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Rofique U Ahmed
Councillor Joshua Peck

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr H Mueenuddin – Muslim Community Representative

Officers Present:

Ashraf Ali – (Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Lutfur Ali – (Assistant Chief Executive)
David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services, Community)
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)
Amanda Thompson – (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed Mr Galpin to the meeting and informed Members that he would be providing legal advice to the Committee.

The Chair also informed Members that Mr Abdur Rouf and Ahabab Miah have been appointed as Parent Governor Representatives on the Committee and would be joining from the March meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed Hussain and Waiseul Islam.

Councillor Peter Golds was present as substitute for Councillor Hussain.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ann Jackson declared a personal interest by reason of being a council tax payer. It was noted that all members of the Committee were council tax payers.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2009 be agreed as a correct record.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

None.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section One reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 January 2009.

7. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

7.1 General Fund Budget Requirement & Council Tax 2009/10 & Medium Term Financial Plan 2009/10 to 2011/12

Councillor Josh Peck, Lead Member for Performance and Resources, presented the budget proposals for 2009/10, and highlighted some of the key limitations and factors within which it had to be formulated. These limitations included the tightening financial situation that the Council faced due to the current economic downturn, and the Government's efficiency targets.

Councillor Peck advised that the budget process had been geared towards the Council's five priorities of:

- Reducing over-crowding
- Raising GCSE results to be the best in the country
- Reducing levels of youth unemployment
- Tackling anti-social behaviour and crime
- Improving cleanliness and quality of the public realm

and included additional funding for carers, young people and for the Safer & Stronger communities partnership.

Councillor Peck responded in detail to questions concerning the Council's Overcrowding Strategy, use of General Fund reserves, location of CCTV cameras, and the allocations.

The Committee expressed concern with regard to the amount of money the Council was investing into waste disposal, but welcomed the proposals to increase recycling which hopefully would reduce these costs.

The Committee also had some discussion about the budget consultation and suggested that in future more specific consultation should be undertaken with local residents and businesses about the budget priorities annually despite the fact that the Council had agreed a three year budget.

Following discussion the Committee:

RESOLVED

To support the budget, in particular the proposal that the level of Council Tax would increase by only 1.69% and that the payment period would be extended from 10 months to 12 months. The Committee also welcomed the proposed efficiency savings and additional investments.

7.2 Capital Programme 2009/10 & Indicative Programme 2010/11 to 2011/12

This item was considered together with item 7.1

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

8.1 Tower Hamlets Index - Monitoring Report October-November 2009

Councillor Peck presented the fourth monitoring report for the new Tower Hamlets Index covering the period October-November 2008.

The Committee noted that 11 of the 25 applicable performance indicators (44%) were on track to achieve their end of year target. A total of 14 indicators (56%) were not meeting their October-November target, of which 4 were predicted to return to target by year end (Amber), while 10 would not (Red).

Councillor Peck advised that compared to the last round of monitoring, the proportion of Red indicators had decreased slightly, and overall the targets were moving in the right direction.

The Committee expressed concern that some indicators were moving from Amber to Red instead of Amber to Green, for example the number of sick days taken. Councillor Peck advised that sickness levels were hard to manage but that managers were continuing to implement the correct procedures in order to address this.

The Committee asked whether or not it would be possible to include targets for each Directorate, and also suggested that it would be helpful to show comparisons to the previous year's performance as well as month on month. Councillor Peck agreed to try and incorporate this.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

9. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT - LEAD MEMBER

Councillor Rofique Uddin Ahmed, Lead Member for Culture, gave a presentation on the key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from his portfolio. Councillor Ahmed was supported by Steve Halsey, Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture, and Heather Bonfield, Interim Head of Cultural Services.

The Committee noted a number of achievements during 2008/9 which included:

- 61% of local leisure centre users rated the facilities as good, very good, or excellent;
- 4th highest level of library participation in the UK, and 3rd highest in London;
- Spa London short listed for Day spa/City spa of the year
- Quest Accreditation Sports and Physical Activity/York Hall

Ms Bonfield then highlighted the key priorities which included the development programme for the Baishakhi Mela, the Idea Store Strategy, the Leisure Centre Strategy, Events in Parks, supporting the Healthy Towns Programme, and the Local Heritage Strategy.

In response to questions the Committee noted that:

- It was possible that the memorial in Bethnal Green could be funded from S106 negotiations;
- Events in parks required greater consultation with residents who live nearby and the Council was looking to introduce a 'Major Events Policy';
- Spa London was in profit;
- The Council aimed to provide facilities for all sports and recreational activities;
- The Council is working with the PCT on a range of initiatives to tackle obesity;
- While swimming lessons were made widely available there is still work to do on the provision of sufficient numbers of women-only sessions.

Members of the Committee also asked questions about the future management of the Mela and also how the Heritage Strategy could include consideration of the Bancroft Road Local History and Archives.

The Chair thanked Councillor Ahmed and the officers for their attendance and for providing responses to the questions raised by the Committee.

10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Scrutiny Lead - One Tower Hamlets - Councillor Ann Jackson

Child Poverty Scrutiny Review.

Councillor Jackson reported that the Working Group had been undertaking 1-2-1 interviews with local residents and had now completed 7 detailed interviews which together with the evidence considered to date would be used to inform the Tackling Child Poverty Strategy which Children's Services were putting together. The interviews had been really useful in bringing together diversity and equalities issues which were at the heart of child poverty to the review.

The next session was on the 19th of February with another session on 26th February 2009 for the Working Group to fully consider the evidence to date. The final meeting to consider the recommendations would take place on 2 April 2009 and the report presented to OSC in May 2009.

Scrutiny Lead – Prosperous Communities – Councillor A A Sardar

Parental Involvement in Secondary Education Scrutiny Review

Councillor Sardar reported that a review meeting to evaluate the different parental engagement programmes in Tower Hamlets had taken place, and it had been evident that the Council was doing a lot of good work to engage parents but needed to find ways to encourage better participation from fathers.

Councillor Sardar had recently attended a parents evening at Raines School to talk to parents about the barriers they faced when engaging with their child's school. He had also taken part in a parenting programme at Oaklands School and the feed back received from parents had been very positive.

The next review meeting would be held on the 25 February 2009 and Head Teachers had been invited to attend to give their views on parental engagement.

Scrutiny Lead – Safe and Supportive Communities – Councillor Shiria Khatun

***Smashed*, Alcohol Misuse and Young People Scrutiny Review**

Councillor Khatun reported that a further review meeting with local organisations involved with young people and alcohol misuse had taken place in order to discuss how the problems could be addressed.

The Working Group would also be visiting the Harca Boys and Girls club to speak to the young people about their experiences of alcohol misuse, and on 19 February would be visiting Lifeline, an agency that treated young people with alcohol problems.

The final review meeting would take place on the 23 February 2009.

Scrutiny Lead - Excellent Public Services – Councillor Bill Turner

Early Intervention – Child Protection Scrutiny Review

Councillor Turner reported that a focus group with practitioners from across the Borough had taken place on 22 January 2009. The session had been very well attended with representatives from Children's Social Care, Adult's Mental Health, the PCT, the police, Children's Centres and Headteachers, and the session had proved invaluable in gaining a perspective from the frontline.

Preparations for site visits to neighbouring boroughs were currently underway.

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

No Section One pre-decision questions for Cabinet were submitted.

12. ANY OTHER SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

Extreme Weather Conditions – Snow Clearance Update

At the request of the Committee Steve Halsey, Corporate Director, Communities, Localities and Culture gave members a brief update on the recent extreme weather conditions, including the actions taken, and the processes and procedures that were put in place.

During a detailed discussion the following general points were noted;

- Concerns were raised regarding the lack of communication and updates between officers and Members.
- Some Members expressed their disappointment in the way in which the Service had operated, despite having received early warnings of this weather.
- Members asked questions on the processes currently in place and what precautions would be taken in the future.
- That meal deliveries and delivery of services for vulnerable people in the Borough had continued despite the weather conditions, and no services had been suspended.
- Members generally raised the concern that side streets, residential areas and pavements were not gritted and had been causing a hazard for local residents.
- That the extreme weather conditions had tested the Borough's snow contingency plans and had also required the Borough Emergency Call Centre to be activated.
- The Council's 'Snow Plan' would be reviewed in order to update and revise where necessary, and to formalise the process for the future.
- Members suggested that officers review the gritting of side streets and to focus on pavements (footways) for safety of residents.

- Members also asked to be provided with clarification about the responsibilities of RSLs.

The meeting finished at 9.25pm

Councillor Abdul Asad, Chair