



Meeting of the

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 6 April 2010 at 7.00 p.m.

AGENDA

VENUE

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

Members:	Deputies (if any):
Chair: Councillor Sirajul Islam Vice-Chair: Councillor Bill Turner	
Councillor Tim Archer Councillor Stephanie Eaton Councillor Alexander Heslop Councillor Ann Jackson Councillor Denise Jones Councillor Abjol Miah Councillor A A Sardar	Councillor Shahed Ali, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Sirajul Islam, Alex Heslop, Ann Jackson, Denise Jones, A. A. Sardar and Bill Turner) Councillor Peter Golds, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Tim Archer) Councillor Shiria Khatun, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Sirajul Islam, Alex Heslop, Ann Jackson, Denise Jones, A. A. Sardar and Bill Turner) Councillor Fozol Miah, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Abjol Miah) Councillor Harun Miah, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Abjol Miah) Councillor M. Mamun Rashid, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Abjol Miah) Councillor David Snowdon, (Designated Deputy representing Councillor Tim Archer)

Councillor Salim Ullah, (Designated Deputy representing Councillors Sirajul Islam, Alex Heslop, Ann Jackson, Denise Jones, A. A. Sardar and Bill Turner)

[Note: The quorum for this body is 3 voting Members].

Co-opted Members:

Vacancy	– (Parent Governor Representative)
Vacancy	– (Muslim Community Representative)
Mr Ahbab Miah	– Parent Governor Representative
Vacancy	– Church of England Diocese Representative
Vacancy	– 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:

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LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 6 April 2010

7.00 p.m.

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. See attached note from the Chief Executive.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

3 - 18

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 March 2010.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

To receive any petitions (to be notified at the meeting).

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

To receive any deputations (to be notified at the meeting).

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no unrestricted reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 10 March 2010.

7. ITEMS OF BUSINESS REQUESTED BY MEMBERS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Under provisions of the Constitution- Part 4 Rules of Procedure, Section 4.5 Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, Paragraph 9 Agenda Items)

7.1 Car-Free Development Schemes and Parking Permit Arrangements

To receive the Member presentation and determine whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should request further scrutiny of this matter.

(Time allocated – 20 minutes).

7.2 Section 106 Funding 3 Limeharbour (former Jaguar showroom)

To receive the Member presentation and determine whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should request further scrutiny of this matter.

(Time allocated – 20 minutes).

8. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Lutfur Rahman, will attend to report on his portfolio.

(Time allocated – 45 minutes)

9. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

(Time allocated – 10 minutes per report)

9.1 Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on The Private Rented Sector 19 - 50

To consider and comment on the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review.

9.2 Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Strengthening Local Community Leadership 51 - 80

To consider and comment on the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review.

9.3 Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Reducing Youth Offending - Supporting Our Most Vulnerable Young People 81 - 116

To consider and comment on the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review.

9.4 Scrutiny Challenge Session: Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools 117 - 126

To consider and comment on the outcomes of the Scrutiny

Challenge Session.

9.5 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2009/ 2010 127 - 150

To consider and comment upon the contents of the report.

10. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET AGENDA

To consider and agree pre-decision scrutiny questions/comments to be presented to Cabinet.

(Time allocated – 5 minutes)

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

To consider any other unrestricted business that the Chair considers to be urgent.

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. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no exempt/confidential reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 10 March 2010.

**15. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/
CONFIDENTIAL CABINET AGENDA**

To consider and agree pre-decision scrutiny questions/comments to be presented to Cabinet.

(Time allocated – 5 minutes)

**16. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL
BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT**

To consider any other exempt/ confidential business that the Chair considers to be urgent.

Agenda Item 2

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS - NOTE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOR MEMBERS OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

This note is guidance only. Members should consult the Council's Code of Conduct for further details. Note: Only Members can decide if they have an interest therefore they must make their own decision. If in doubt as to the nature of an interest it is advisable to seek advice **prior** to attending at a meeting.

Declaration of interests for Members

Where Members have a personal interest in any business of the authority as described in paragraph 4 of the Council's Code of Conduct (contained in part 5 of the Council's Constitution) then s/he must disclose this personal interest as in accordance with paragraph 5 of the Code. Members must disclose the existence and nature of the interest at the start of the meeting and certainly no later than the commencement of the item or where the interest becomes apparent.

You have a **personal interest** in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- (a) An interest that you must **register**
- (b) An interest that is not on the register, but where the well-being or financial position of you, members of your family, or people with whom you have a close association, is likely to be affected by the business of your authority more than it would affect the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision.

Where a personal interest is declared a Member may stay and take part in the debate and decision on that item.

What constitutes a prejudicial interest? - Please refer to paragraph 6 of the adopted Code of Conduct.

Your personal interest will also be a prejudicial interest in a matter if (a), (b) and either (c) or (d) below apply:-

- (a) A member of the public, who knows the relevant facts, would reasonably think that your personal interests are so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgment of the public interests; AND
- (b) The matter does not fall within one of the exempt categories of decision listed in paragraph 6.2 of the Code; AND EITHER
- (c) The matter affects your financial position or the financial interest of a body with which you are associated; or
- (d) The matter relates to the determination of a licensing or regulatory application

The key points to remember if you have a prejudicial interest in a matter being discussed at a meeting:-

- i. You must declare that you have a prejudicial interest, and the nature of that interest, as soon as that interest becomes apparent to you; and
- ii. You must leave the room for the duration of consideration and decision on the item and not seek to influence the debate or decision unless (iv) below applies; and

- iii. You must not seek to improperly influence a decision in which you have a prejudicial interest.
- iv. If Members of the public are allowed to speak or make representations at the meeting, give evidence or answer questions about the matter, by statutory right or otherwise (e.g. planning or licensing committees), you can declare your prejudicial interest but make representations. However, you must immediately leave the room once you have finished your representations and answered questions (if any). You cannot remain in the meeting or in the public gallery during the debate or decision on the matter.

There are particular rules relating to a prejudicial interest arising in relation to Overview and Scrutiny Committees

- You will have a prejudicial interest in any business before an Overview & Scrutiny Committee or sub committee meeting where both of the following requirements are met:-
 - (i) That business relates to a decision made (whether implemented or not) or action taken by the Council's Executive (Cabinet) or another of the Council's committees, sub committees, joint committees or joint sub committees
 - (ii) You were a Member of that decision making body at the time and you were present at the time the decision was made or action taken.
- If the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is conducting a review of the decision which you were involved in making or if there is a 'call-in' you may be invited by the Committee to attend that meeting to answer questions on the matter in which case you must attend the meeting to answer questions and then leave the room before the debate or decision.
- If you are not called to attend you should not attend the meeting in relation to the matter in which you participated in the decision unless the authority's constitution allows members of the public to attend the Overview & Scrutiny for the same purpose. If you do attend then you must declare a prejudicial interest even if you are not called to speak on the matter and you must leave the debate before the decision.

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.05 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2010

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

Members Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam (Chair)

Councillor Tim Archer
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Alexander Heslop
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor A A Sardar

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr Ahbab Miah – Parent Governor Representative

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Ohid Ahmed (Lead Member Resources & Performance)
Councillor Rofique Ahmed (Lead Member Culture & Leisure)
Councillor Oliur Rahman (Lead Member Employment & Skills)

Guests Present:

–

Officers Present:

Agnes Adrien – (Team Leader, Enforcement & Litigation, Legal Services)
Mohammed Ahad – (Scrutiny Policy Officer, Scrutiny & Equalities)
Lutfur Ali – (Assistant Chief Executive)
Vicky Allen – (Performance Information Officer, Strategy & Performance)
Heather Bonfield – (Interim Head of Cultural Services , Communities Localities & Culture)
Barry Clark – (Administrative Support Officer Scrutiny & Equalities)
Stephanie Ford – (Interim Performance Manager, Strategy & Performance)
Stephen Halsey – (Corporate Director, Communities, Localities &

	Culture)
Afazul Hoque	– (Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny & Equalities)
Lorrayne Johnson	– (Communications Officer, Corporate Communications)
Chris Naylor	– (Corporate Director, Resources)
Matthew Vaughan	– (Political Advisor to the Conservative Group, Democratic Services)
Angus Taylor	– (Scrutiny and Regulatory Team Leader, Democratic Services)

COUNCILLOR S. ISLAM (CHAIR) IN THE CHAIR

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor B. Turner, Vice-Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Lead – Excellent Public Services.
- Councillor A. Jackson, Scrutiny Lead – One Tower Hamlets.
- Councillor S. Eaton, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.
- Mr M. Keating, Service Heads Scrutiny and Equalities, for whom Mr A. Hoque, Scrutiny Policy Manager, was deputising.

Noted

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A. Heslop declared a personal interest in Agenda item 7.1 “Performance and Corporate Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2009/10 – Performance to 31st December 2009” on the basis that the report contained recommendations regarding the monitoring of the Authority’s performance in relation to housing services, including that of Tower Hamlets Homes and Councillor Heslop was a representative of the Authority on the governing body of Tower Hamlets Homes and a Tower Hamlets Leaseholder.

Noted.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

Councillor Alex Heslop, Scrutiny Lead – A Great Place to Live, identified a typographical error on page 9, Verbal Updates from Scrutiny Leads, A Great Place to Live – Private Rented Sector, paragraph 3, line 1 which should read

“leasing” and not “lasing” and proposed that the minutes be amended accordingly.

The Chair **Moved** (taking account of the motion from Councillor Heslop) and it was: -

Resolved

That, subject to the amendment detailed at (a) below, the unrestricted minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9th February 2010 be approved and signed by the Chair, as a correct record of the proceedings.

- (a) page 9, Verbal Updates from Scrutiny Leads, A Great Place to Live – Private Rented Sector, paragraph 3, line 1 the word “lasing” to be replaced with the word “leasing”.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

Nil items.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

7. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

7.1 Performance and Corporate Revenue Budget Monitoring report 2009-10

Councillor A. Heslop declared a personal interest in Agenda item 7.1 “Performance and Corporate Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2009/10 – Performance to 31st December 2009” on the basis that the report contained recommendations regarding the monitoring of the Authority’s performance in relation to housing services, including that of Tower Hamlets Homes and Councillor Heslop was a representative of the Authority on the governing body of Tower Hamlets Homes and a Tower Hamlets Leaseholder.

Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Lead Member Resources and Performance, at the request of the Chair, introduced the report which drew together progress reports in relation to Strategic Plan Indicators, General Fund Revenue Budget

and Housing Revenue Budget to the end of December 2009 (Quarter 3), summarising the salient points contained therein and highlighting in particular:

- Of the 85 Strategic Indicators 36 could be reported on in Quarter 3, although in year targets had not been set for 3 of these. 14 of the 33 applicable indicators had met or exceeded performance targets, and were on track to achieve their year-end target. Overall 21 indicators had improved performance measured at the same point in 2008/09.
- 19 of the applicable indicators were off target, although 9 of these had improved performance measured at the same point in 2008/09 and 1 which was off target in October/ November had returned to target by year end. However of the 19 indicators off target over the 3rd Quarter, 11 had been identified as missing their year-end target by over 10 per cent and these were detailed on pages 17 to 19 of the agenda.
- An overspend of £1.7 million was projected for the General Fund Revenue Budget, a decrease of £0.643 million from the position at the end of September 2009 (Quarter 2). An overspend of £2.6 million was projected for the Housing Revenue Account Budget, which was unchanged from the position at the end of September 2009 (Quarter 2).

A discussion followed which focussed on the following points:

- Clarification was sought, with reference to the £1.29million underspend for tenant and leaseholder service charges detailed on page 28 of the agenda, as to whether this resulted from more revenue than expenditure (overcharging) and in particular whether this would result in a refund to leaseholders. Also whether Tower Hamlets Leaseholders had been appraised of this position. Councillor Ahmed undertook to refer the request for clarification to the Corporate Director Development and Renewal to respond in writing.
- Clarification/ assurance was sought, with reference to the reporting that National Indicator 154 Net additional homes provided and National Indicator 155 Number of affordable homes provided were off target and that the latter was projected to miss its year end target, as to reasons for this. It was noted that Councillor Francis, Lead Member Housing and Development, had attended the January meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and given optimistic assurances that performance was on track to meet targets by year end. The downturn in the economy, reported as the cause for missing the year-end target for NI155 had been a known factor in January. Councillor Ahmed undertook to refer the request for clarification to the Corporate Director Development and Renewal to respond in writing.
- Clarification/ assurance was sought and given, with reference to the reporting of a zero projected variance of expenditure against budget for the Chief Executive's Directorate. It was commented that this was positive news given the projected overspend of £397,000, at the end of September (Quarter 2); however the absence of a commentary as to how costs had been reined in was noted, and clarification was sought as to whether additional funds had been used to mitigate the position. Mr Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive, responded that the Communications Service had been historically underfunded and

advertising revenues for East End Life normally more than offset this. The economic downturn had reduced such revenues and this was reflected in Quarter 2 reporting. However this position had improved in Quarter 3 and budget underspends elsewhere in the Chief Executive's Directorate had also been used to produce a balanced budget.

- Clarification was sought, with reference to the £450,000 underspend for Adults Homecare detailed on page 22 of the agenda, as to how numbers of referrals and associated costs were to be controlled. Councillor Ahmed undertook to refer the request for clarification to the Corporate Director Adults Health and Wellbeing to respond in writing.
- Clarification/ assurance was sought and given, regarding the £800,000 overspend for Administrative Buildings detailed on page 27 of the agenda and the mitigating actions to contain costs referred to thereat. Mr Chris Naylor, Corporate Director Resources, responded that the overspend had resulted from the Council's original Accommodation Strategy having been predicated on disposals of administrative buildings which had not taken place. Negotiations were ongoing to mitigate the overspend and this included sub-letting part of Anchorage House in the short term. In the medium term the Council was pursuing a course to vacate Anchorage House altogether by 2013. Meantime the 2010/11 Budget process had included the creation of a small contingency to meet projected costs.
- Clarification/ assurance was sought and given, with reference to the reporting that Strategic Indicator 109 Percentage of Hotlines answered and Strategic Indicator 110 Average waiting time for calls to Hotlines to be answered were off target and had deteriorated since the December 2008. This poor performance was considered to be of major concern and an assurance was sought that it was being properly investigated and that the problems with the new telephony system were not so bad as to require a reversion to the previous system, but could instead be mitigated. Mr Chris Naylor, Corporate Director Resources, responded that there were technical failures at the Contact Centre that went beyond the normal teething problems arising from the migration of such a large number of telephone lines to a different platform and the parallel teething problems arising from the introduction of a new Telephony system at Tower Hamlets Homes. The contractual issues were being discussed at the highest levels, and clarity as to whether British Telecom could continue to provide the service was imminent.
- Concern was also expressed that the combined overspends in Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Directorate and Adults Health and Wellbeing (AHWB), when combined amounted to approximately £2million, and the Committee was charged with scrutinising such issues so as to prevent matters getting out of control. It was requested that a written explanation for this and the associated action being taken to contain expenditure within budget be provided to all members of the Committee as a matter of urgency. Mr Chris Naylor, Corporate Director Resources, responded that AHWB expenditure was being contained within the directorate budget. With regard to CSF the main area of overspend had been caused by unprecedented levels of referrals in children's social care, where there was a statutory obligation to

respond. The 2010/11 directorate budget had been set to reflect the expected number of referrals, and a process was underway to redesign service provision to cope with the demand without causing additional cost.

The Chair **Moved** the recommendations, as contained in the report, and it was:-

Resolved

1. That performance information (Performance against targets for the 3rd Quarter), as set out in the report be noted; and
2. That the actions to be taken in 2009/10 to contain spending within Budget, be noted.

8. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

8.1 Strategic Plan 2009/10-11/12: Year 2 Action Plan; and Outline Plan

Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Lead Member Resources and Performance, at the request of the Chair, introduced the report which contained the Strategic Plan 2009/10-2011/12 Year 2 Action Plan, summarising the salient points contained therein and highlighting in particular:

- That the Corporate Management Team had considered the Year 2 Action Plan in mid November 2009 and the plan had subsequently been circulated to all Members for comment, but none had been received.
- In view of the forthcoming Municipal election in May 2010 there was a commitment to review and if necessary refresh the Year 2 Action Plan to reflect the priorities of a new Administration.

Clarification was sought and given that the traditional all Members seminar would be held regarding the Strategic Plan in June following the Municipal elections in May.

The Chair **Moved** the recommendations, as contained in the report, and it was:-

Resolved

That the Council's Strategic Plan 2009/10-2010/11: Year 2 Action Plan and Outline Plan be noted.

9. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

9.1 Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Reducing Worklessness amongst Young Adults 18-24

Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar, Scrutiny Lead – A Prosperous Community, at the request of the Chair, introduced the report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Reducing Worklessness amongst 18-24 year olds, summarising the salient points contained therein highlighting in particular:

- That the review group had undertaken in the review over a 6 month period since June 2009, which had comprised a number of sessions with Council Officers, partner agencies (including national ones), the Third Sector and local residents (including workshops and focus groups with young adults).
- The recommendations encompassed 6 main areas ranging from apprenticeship and entry level opportunities for young adults to greater outreach to communities not accessing the labour market, early intervention to tackle generational worklessness and strengthening community leadership. It was hoped that the timely recommendations in a time of recession would improve the opportunities locally available to young adults to secure employment and create prosperity for residents generally.

A discussion followed, during which the report and recommendations contained therein were broadly welcomed, and which was centred on the following points:

- Which of the 20 recommendations, contained in the report of the working group, the Scrutiny Lead Member considered to be the most important. Access, training and partnership working with the Third Sector were emphasised as vital elements by the Lead Member.
- Whether the Scrutiny Lead Member considered that if the recommendations had been implemented two years previously they would have had a significant impact on current levels of worklessness. The Lead Member affirmed that such implementation would have proven effective.
- Recommendation 13 “That the Employment and Enterprise Team devise a clear Enterprise Strategy which gives ongoing support to local social enterprises and encourages entrepreneurship amongst young adults” was particularly welcomed as it was considered that the role of social enterprise required comprehensive examination with a view to future service provision.

The Chair in **Moving** the recommendations, as contained in the report, asked that the Cabinet respond to the recommendations of the working group; and it was:-

Resolved

1. That the draft report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Reducing Worklessness amongst 18-24 year olds be endorsed; and

2. That the Service Head Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree the final report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for A Prosperous Community.

9.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Tracking Report: Update

The Chair introduced the second bi-annual tracking report monitoring progress in the implementation of recommendations from past scrutiny reviews summarising the salient points contained therein and highlighting:

- That the outcome of the first tracking review earlier in the year, when Scrutiny Lead Members revisited a previous review within their portfolio area were set out at paragraph 3.3.
- That overall the report showed that overall directorates/ services were implementing the majority of scrutiny review recommendations and therefore the work of Scrutiny had influenced key strategies and campaigns.
- Appendix 1 set out an update on scrutiny reviews where implementation was being monitored. A number were traffic lighted as amber, but this was primarily due to their being in the early stages of implementation or recent agreement by Cabinet.

A short discussion followed which focussed on the following points:

- With reference to the Choice Based Lettings Review, whilst good progress in relation to implementing 18 of the 20 recommendations was noted, it was requested that a progress update be provided to Councillor Heslop, Scrutiny Lead – A Great Place to Live, in respect of the review recommendation of a full feasibility study for an East London Lettings Company.
- With reference to the revisiting of Domestic Violence Review and the consequent identification of concerns about sustainable funding of DV services, in the first tracking review detailed on page 182 of the agenda, it was requested that a progress update on the concerns raised be provided to Councillor Jones, Scrutiny Lead – Safe and Supportive.
- Consideration that given the levels of concern being expressed by constituents to Members regarding funding of English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), and in particular that it wasn't being channelled through Tower Hamlets College, a communications initiative was needed to reassure the public that ESOL funding was available and that the Council was committed to this although there had been a reduction in resources from Government.

The Chair **Moved** the recommendations, as contained in the report, and it was:-

Resolved

That the reported progress in respect of the implementation of past Scrutiny Review recommendations endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be noted.

10. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Ms Heather Bonfield, Interim Service Head Cultural Services gave a presentation outlining the elements comprising the portfolio of Councillor Rofique Ahmed, Lead Member Culture and Leisure, and detailing the key achievements and challenges/ priorities associated with it in the Municipal Year to date; this focused on the points set out below.

The Chair informed members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a paper containing the main points of the presentation had been **Tabled**, a copy of which would be interleaved with the minutes. Ms Bonfield also **Tabled** a Culture and Leisure 2009/10 "year book" which set out performance targets set at the request of the Lead Member and associated performance, a copy of which would be interleaved with the minutes.

Achievements

- *Clear strategic direction* from the Lead Member, on taking service provision forward, had been essential given the range of activities in the portfolio area:
 - Idea Store Strategy refreshed - with new Ideas Store Metro's to provide more wide ranging services including unemployment and health support.
 - Leisure Centre Strategy adopted in 2009 with consequent progress on future of Poplar Baths.
 - Development of Public Arts, Local History and Archives Strategies for future consideration.
- *Raising Service Standards, Quality and performance in an environment of financial constraint:*
 - Self assessment with Cultural Services Improvement Tool methodology and Peer review by LB Hackney undertaken to identify areas for improvement.
 - Working with leisure contractor Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) to improve customer care and standards with action plan and robust performance monitoring in place. Consequent improvements at Mile End Leisure Centre.
 - Award - Spa London at York Hall had just won spa of the year.
 - Idea Store improved performance: Visitor numbers up from 1.6 million in 2005/06 to 2 million. Issues up from 877,000 in 2005/06 to approximately 1 million.
 - Leisure centre improved usage - visits up to almost 2 million.
 - Improved Survey Results reflecting customer satisfaction with value for money and the service provided. Idea Store at

Whitechapel 91% and Canary Wharf 94% . Leisure Centre rating 45% of good/verygood/excellent above London average of 44%.

- *Value for Money*
Renegotiated redistribution of GLL leisure contract surpluses with ratio of 75% GLL 25% LBTH now revised to 25% GLL, 50% reinvested in service within Tower Hamlets by GLL and 25% for LBTH to direct to service development.
- *Culture in the Community*
 - Baishakhi Mela – 2009 successfully delivered in house and large amount of sponsorship funding secured. Currently working in partnership with Community on 2010 event.
 - Film Festival well attended
 - Major Music Events Programme and Fireworks, focussed in Victoria Park, very popular. Robust noise management initiative for events had led to less complaints with more people attending.
 - Cultural Olympiad held with a view to 2012 Olympic Games
 - Community Festivals
 - Profile of sport raised for 2012 Games with events eg at Mile End Park for: Paralympics and a talent day.
- *Service Transformations*
 - Free Swimming: Government funded for 60+ and under 16 with the biggest increase in uptake for any London borough (13500 visits). Supplemented by LBTH initiatives “Free Swim Friday” and “Family Swim Saturday” (13000 visits). Successful outreach to young women through the Healthy Swim Programme and overall positive impact in supporting Tower Hamlets PCT targets to tackle local health issues heart disease, diabetes and obesity.
 - Bancroft Local History Library and Archives progress: £225,000 LBTH funding allocated to DDA and health/ safety infrastructural works. Heritage Manager appointed to help secure funding and develop masterplan to include leveraging in external funding. Engagement of users in developing masterplan with new focus on engaging young people, outreach, digitisation and declutter. Clarity and partnership working on the housing of collections.
 - Chrisp Street and Watney Market Idea Store changes encouraging family use- children’s area
 - Client Advisory Boards comprising users with ward councillor chair and overarching Borough Advisory Board to drive forward service improvement at local centres of leisure provision.

Challenges/ Priorities

- *Development/Refresh/Implementation of a set of strategies: Idea Store Strategy, Leisure Strateg, Sports Strategy, Culture Strategy, Playing Pitch Strategy, Local History and Archives Strategy*
- *Baishakhi Mela – successful in house delivery 2010*
- *Community Festival Programme, Events in Parks, Live Site*
- *Cultural Olympiad, 2010 pre and in-Games arrangements and Olympic Legacy*
- *Mile End Leisure Centre Improvements - £1.5 million of expenditure*

- *Usage of LBTH share of Leisure Contract for service improvements: Poplar Baths, Mile End Park, Brady Centre and Kobi Nazrul.*
- *Implement Self-Service in all Ideas Stores and Libraries*

Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee then posed a series of detailed questions to which Ms Bonfield and Mr Steve Halsey, Corporate Director Communities, Localities and Culture, responded. The question and answer session was centred on the following points:

- Clarification/ assurance was sought and given, with reference to the implementation of the Idea Store Strategy in 2010/11, as to what could be envisaged in respect of:
 - Closure or relocation of existing libraries; and in particular the location of the Idea Store at Crossharbour and the impact of this on Cubitt Town Library. Ms Bonfield responded that no library closures were envisaged (and the strategy focused on soft implementation: changing the way services were delivered to improve the offer eg longer opening hours, service additions such as unemployment and health support and shaping the Idea Store Metros to offer more than a library but less than a main IS but retaining the same core element. Watney Market was likely to be the priority for the first IS Metro given current under-provision in the area.
 - Plans, including disposal, for Limehouse Library, currently empty and considered to be in a deteriorating condition. Mr Halsey responded that there were no plans to dispose, refurbish or bring back into use this building, and its future was a matter for the corporate Asset Management Board.
- Clarification/ assurance was sought and given, with reference to the implementation of the Public Art Strategy, as to future plans for the Henry Moore Sculpture. Ms Bonfield outlined the history of the sculpture, that it remained in Council ownership on free loan to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park for public display, and there was no plan to change that.
- Clarification was sought and given regarding the planned improvements for the Brady Centre and whether funding was secured. Ms Bonfield referenced the Section 106 funding in place for the green roof and that this should lever in external funding for environmental sustainability.
- Noting the successful in-house delivery of the Baishakhi Mela in 2009, clarification was sought and given regarding the envisaged timeline for transfer of the organisation of the festival back to community control and process to advertise and select local residents wishing to become involved. Mr Halsey confirmed that a number of issues had delayed the transfer of the Mela to a community trust and the Council had determined, pending the establishment of a community trust in 2011, that it should deliver it in 2010. The Council had set aside some revenue funding for this in 2009 and unprecedented income had been generated. There would be a general invitation for potential board members for the new community trust.

- Clarification was sought and given regarding the future of the Brick Lane Arches scheme which had been managed by Cultural Services. Mr Halsey outlined the background to the withdrawal of the application for planning consent and plans for further consultation prior to resubmission of the application later in 2010. Also clarified that the Council was responsible for long term management of the arch and minoret.
- Clarification sought and given regarding complaints by paid up membership holders that they had had to queue for long periods due to the demand from those swimming for free. Ticketing system now working successfully. Councillor Rofique Ahmed, Lead Member Culture and Leisure, commented that he was happy to look into any complaints about the free swim experience.
- Concern was expressed, particularly with reference to the Whitechapel Sports Centre, that ward councillors were not aware of the establishment of the Client Advisory Boards. Accordingly it was requested that all councillors be notified in writing of the new initiative. Councillor Ahmed responded that the boards were a very recent development and any councillors wishing to participate would be able to do so. He undertook to find out and inform the Chair which Bethnal Green South Ward Councillor had chaired the first CAB relating to the Whitechapel Sports Centre.
- Clarification sought and given as to whether the Council's Leisure Contract had been insufficiently client managed previously and only now service provision was being optimised through performance monitoring and management. Ms Bonfield responded that performance management had always been in place but a more robust framework had now been applied. Also the contract had only achieved a surplus in 2009/10 and related contractual aspects had consequently been renegotiated so Tower Hamlets saw more benefit from this.
- Clarification sought and given that the Council's leisure contractor Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) paid its employees the London Living Wage.
- Clarification sought regarding whether excessive energy costs for GLL sites had been addressed. Ms Bonfield confirmed that these were absorbed within the contract and would not feed through into price rises for users.

The Chair thanked Ms Heather Bonfield and Councillor Rofique Ahmed for the detailed presentation, and subsequently **Moved** and it was:-

Resolved

That the presentation be formally received and noted.

11. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET AGENDA

The Chair informed members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a sheet of pre-decision questions/ comments in respect of the unrestricted business contained in the agenda for consideration by the Cabinet, at their meeting to be held on 10th March 2010, had been **Tabled**, a copy of which would be interleaved with the minutes.

Councillor Heslop, in referring to Agenda item 6.2 "New Lettings Policy" on the agenda for consideration by the Cabinet at their meeting the following evening, commented that he was aware that some Members remained unclear, as to whether inclusion within the proposed new Lettings Policy of a provision for sons and daughters of existing Tower Hamlets leaseholders to apply for social housing, discriminated against children of freeholders in Tower Hamlets. Councillor Heslop considered that the legality of this provision should therefore be investigated, and Members subsequently provided with clarification, and accordingly suggested that members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might wish to approve this as an additional pre-decision scrutiny question to those already tabled.

Mr Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive, advised that the matter raised by Councillor Heslop could be adequately addressed in a written response, to Members, from Ms Isabella Freeman, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) and Monitoring Officer.

The Chair **Moved** (taking account of the advice of the Assistant Chief Executive) and it was **Resolved**:-

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

Agenda Item 6.1 Poplar Baths Development Plans (CAB 120/090)

1. We know that Government funding for local authorities will be reduced over the next few years. Has Cabinet considered if it is prudent to consider committing revenue funds to new projects?
2. Will revenue for running costs at Poplar Baths be reliant on making savings in other services?
3. How many visitors would be needed annually to reduce the subsidy outlined at 6.3.1?
4. Has Cabinet considered whether there would be any detrimental effect on Mile End Leisure Centre and Tiller Road Baths as result of opening a new centre in Poplar Baths?
5. Can Cabinet explain why they think Poplar Baths site is the best choice for a new swimming pool for the rising population in the east of the Borough?

6. In reference to paragraph 6.4.2 can Cabinet specify which developer contributions has been identified to cover leisure centre and Poplar Baths restoration design costs to RIBA Design Stage D? Furthermore, have these funds been earmarked for any other projects and if so what are those and how will they be funded now?

12. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The agenda circulated contained no Section Two business (business containing information defined as exempt or confidential in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government, Act 1972, nor were any such items of business tabled or considered to be urgent. There was therefore no requirement to adopt the standard recommended motion to exclude the press and public, under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, to allow for consideration of such business prior to the conclusion of the meeting.

SUMMARY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

14. EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

15. EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

16. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL CABINET AGENDA

Nil items.

17. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 8.17 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Sirajul Islam
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Agenda Item 9.1

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6 th April 2010	Unrestricted		
Report of: Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive		Title: <i>Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on the Private Rented Sector</i>		
Originating Officer(s): Mohammed Ahad Scrutiny Policy Officer		Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Private Rented Sector Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Agree the report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Service Head for Scrutiny and Equalities to amend the final report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for A Great Place to Live.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (AS AMENDED) SECTION 100D

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

Background paper

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

None

N/A

3. Background

- 3.1 In June 2009 the Scrutiny Lead for a *Great Place to Live*, Councillor Alex Heslop, identified the Private Rented Sector as a priority for review and in July 2009 a Scrutiny Working Group was established. Reasons for this review include the negative publicity within the sector as well as the notion that residents who have no real chance of social housing and can't afford to buy are reliant on the Private Rented Sector. The key aim for the review was to identify gaps and issues that exist within this very important housing sector in Tower Hamlets and recommend potential initiatives which could improve service deliver.
- 3.2 The review had a number of key objectives:
- To analyse issues facing tenants of the PRS
 - To identify gaps in the support available to tenants of the PRS
 - To examine issues that may effect landlords who are renting out to tenants
 - To analyse the growing number of private tenants of leaseholders and how the housing partners should interact with such tenants
 - To consider the merits and demerits of possible initiatives such as the Council providing a full management service for leaseholders who are subletting
- 3.3 The Working Group undertook various evidence gathering sessions and heard from key stakeholders including Crises, Shelter, Tower Hamlets Homes, the National Landlords Association and local RSLs. Evidence was also heard from a number of Council Services. These have been useful in framing recommendations for this review.
- 3.4 A number of recommendations have been put forward for consideration. At the heart of these recommendations include the need to develop a new Private Sector Housing Strategy in order to understand and analyse the current status of the sector locally. The review recognised that the private sector can no longer be the sector of default but rather needs to be the sector of choice for many of our local residents. Furthermore, there was a need to move away from a policy of enforcement to one of self regulation by increasing our support for good landlords. There was a need to publicise the work of good landlords and endorse them on the Council's website. Good landlords should also be supported in accessing grant or loan funding to improve the quality and energy efficiency of their properties.
- 3.5 With expected cuts in public services looming the Working Group also suggested the urgent need to work in greater partnership with organisations who have an interest and are effected by the PRS and in particular the issues relating to Health and Housing. Members were also keen for the borough to explore developing models to see the feasibility of providing a full management service for those leaseholders that are sub-letting their properties.
- 3.6 The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix A.

3.7 Once agreed, the Working Groups report will be submitted to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations.

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

4.1 The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for Cabinet to provide a response.

4.2 The Council has broad housing functions as a housing provider, a housing enabler and as a regulator of the standard of housing accommodation. The recommendations set out in the report appear capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions.

4.3 For example, the report recommends that the Council carry out a full private sector condition survey. Whilst this is not in terms dealt with in legislation, the Council does have a duty under section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 to keep housing conditions in Tower Hamlets under review with a view to identifying action that may need to be taken under specified provisions, including enforcement of housing standards under the 2004 Act, licensing of houses in multiple occupation and provision of housing assistance. The Council is also subject to a duty under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 to consider housing conditions in Tower Hamlets and the needs of Tower Hamlets with respect to the provision of further accommodation. A condition survey is capable of being viewed as discharging the Council's duties in this regard.

4.4 Whether or not each recommendation is lawful will ultimately depend on the detail of how it is carried out. If, ultimately, the Council pursues the recommendations, it will be for officers to ensure that legal advice is taken as appropriate and the recommendations are carried out lawfully.

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

5.1 This report describes the review and recommendations of the Private Rented Sector Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5.2 There are no specific financial implications emanating from this report but in the event that the Council agrees further action in response to this report's recommendations then officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

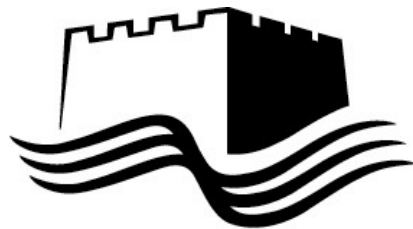
6. One Tower Hamlets consideration

- 6.1 A number of recommendations in this report have One Tower Hamlets implications as the intended outcome is to reduce housing inequalities within the borough with the greater use of the private rented sector.
- 6.2 Recommendations 2, 4, 6, and 7 are linked to making sure that private rented properties meet the decant homes standards which is a component of One Tower Hamlets as is outlined in the Community Plan.

7. Risk Management

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

Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on The Private Rented Sector



TOWER HAMLETS

**London Borough of Tower Hamlets
March 2010**

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Acknowledgments

The Working Group would like to thank all the officers and partners that supported this review. The views and perspectives of all that were involved have been fundamental in shaping the final recommendations of this report.

Working Group Chair:

Councillor Alex Heslop

Working Group Members:

Councillor Rachel Saunders

Councillor Shahed Ali

Councillor Bill Turner

Councillor Abjol Miah

Councillor Shirley Houghton

Other Members:

Councillor Marc Francis - Lead Member, Housing and Development

Councillor Sirajul Islam - Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

London Borough of Tower Hamlets:

Alan Warner	Private Sector Housing and HIA Co-ordinator
Alison Thomas	Private Sector and Affordable Housing Manager
Aman Dalvi	Corporate Director, Development and Renewal
Colin Cormack	Head of Homeless and Housing Services
David Farrell	Head of Environmental Health and Environmental Control
Fiona Wellington	Family Rent Deposit Scheme Team Leader
Jackie Odunoye	Service Head for Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability
Jane Gardner-Hayter	Team Leader for Health and Housing
John Coker	Strategic Housing Manager
Lee Fearon	Benefits Policy and procedures Manager
Moyowa Ekperigin	Housing Advisor
Noella Ling	Housing Advice Team Leader
Steve Hill	Benefits Services Manager

Scrutiny and Equalities:

Afazul Hoque	Scrutiny Policy Manager
Michael Keating	Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities
Mohammed Ahad	Scrutiny Policy Officer
Shamima Begum	Future Job Fund Trainee

External:

Barbara Ashcroft	Residences Office Manager, Queen Mary College
David Hewitt	Private Renting and Housing Development Manager, Crisis
Elliot Altman	Director, ElliotLeigh

EuGin Song	West London Representative, National Landlords Association
Jack Ashdown	Service Improvement Team, Tower Hamlets Homes
Jamie Carswell	Director of Strategy and Performance, Tower Hamlets Homes
Joan Murphy	Director of Strategic Operations, Poplar HARCA
June Barnes	Group Chief Executive, East Thames
Kobir Gofur	Director, Hamletts
Leigh Young	Director, ElliotLeigh
Naz Rahman	Director, Hamletts
Paul Perkin	Head of Homelessness, Look Ahead
Robert Smyth	Policy and Performance Manager, Look Ahead
Sharon Allen	Area Housing Manager, Tower Hamlets Homes
Vaughan Jones	Chief Executive, Praxis

Chair's Foreword

**Cllr Alex Heslop
Scrutiny Lead, A Great Place to Live**

Recommendations

The Working Groups recommendations set out the areas requiring consideration and action by the Council with regards to the Private Rented Sector in the Borough. The recommendations have been split into strategic and operational issues and cover areas around Partnership and Efficiency, Health and Housing and the Role of Landlords.

Strategic

- R1 That the Development and Renewal Directorate develops a new Private Sector Housing Strategy which incorporates recommendations from this review and issues highlighted in the Housing Strategy and Housing and Homelessness Strategy
- R2 That the Development and Renewal Directorate undertake a full Private Sector Condition Survey to provide an evidence base for the Private Sector Housing Strategy and the update to the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Empty Properties Framework
- R3 That the Development and Renewal Directorate, Tower Hamlets Homes and local Registered Social Landlords explore the feasibility of providing a full management service for leaseholders that sub-let their properties
- R4 That the Communities, Localities and Culture Directorate develops a partnership strategy which includes NHS Tower Hamlets, the London Fire Brigade and the third sector to deal with homes in poor condition. This should include the sharing of resources as highlighted by the Healthy Homes programme in Liverpool City Council

Operational

- R5 That the Development and Renewal Directorate commit to utilising Private Rented Sector stock to its full capacity instead of using Bed and Breakfast and Hostels where possible
- R6 That the Environmental Health Team implements the new powers given to local authorities which allows the licensing of all landlords including those with Houses of Multiple Occupations (HMOs)
- R7 That the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum uses local media to increase awareness of the benefits of the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) and publicises which local landlords are accredited and registered on its website

- R8 That the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum and Tower Hamlets Homes publicise the Landlords Forum through the greater use of local media and an annual "*Landlord of the Year*" award
- R9 That a representative from the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum have a standing invitation on the Great Place to Live Community Plan Delivery Group
- R10 That the Development and Renewal Directorate support private landlords access grant or loan funding to improve the quality and energy efficiency of the PRS
- R11 That the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum takes lead in exploring the development of a regional landlord's forum
- R12 The Housing Benefits Service continue moving from a process of paying housing benefits through cheques to payments through BACs
- R13 The Housing Benefits Service explore the possibility of sending schedules of payment to landlords through email along with written copies to increase efficiency
- R14 That the Housing Benefits Services and Housing Advice Service explore the possibility of a Benefits Officer being based within the Housing Advice Team

Introduction

1. The housing challenge in Tower Hamlets is immense, as the borough continues to witness major new house building and redevelopment. Between 2004 and 2008 up to 9,000 new homes have been built in the borough, 3,238 of them have been affordable homes. This makes Tower Hamlets one of the largest deliverers of affordable housing in the country. However, the borough still has 9,446 overcrowded households in socially rented homes, and 1,798 of these are severely overcrowded¹. This makes private rented accommodation in the borough very important.
2. The importance and reliance on the Private Rented Sector (PRS) nationally is immense. The sector is used to house a range of different communities including students, professionals and the homeless. In Tower Hamlets the sector is also widely utilised by students attending the borough's two local Universities (Queen Mary College and the London Metropolitan). In addition to this the borough is historically seen as a settling ground for migrant workers which have meant a long history of the PRS housing the homeless. It is stated that satisfaction with the PRS is better than the social sector according to tenants as highlighted by the national homelessness charity Crisis. This is also consistent with the Government's response to the Rugg Review (2009)² which states that three quarters of all private tenants are either very or fairly satisfied with their landlords.
3. However a number of questions remain unanswered. What is the impact of the PRS in Tower Hamlets? What issues do tenants and landlords face and what support is available to them? What partnership working is currently in place relating to the PRS and finally in what condition is the borough's housing stock and what impact does this have on health and housing in the borough. These are some of the questions this review considered.
4. This review will build on the reviews undertaken over the last three years to support the improvement of the housing stock in the borough and the service provided to local residents. The three previous scrutiny reviews in this area include:
 - Affordable Home Ownership 2008/09
 - Choice Based Lettings 2007/08
 - Leaseholders: A case study of Customer Care 2006/07
5. In June 2009 the Scrutiny Lead for a *Great Place to Live*, Councillor Alex Heslop, identified the PRS as a priority for review and in July 2009 the Scrutiny Working Group was established. Reasons for this review include the negative publicity within the sector as well as the notion that residents who have no real chance of social housing and can't afford to buy are reliant on the PRS. The key aim for the review was to identify gaps and issues that exist within the PRS in Tower Hamlets and recommend potential initiatives which could improve service delivery.

¹LBTH Overcrowding reduction Strategy, 2009-12

²<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/publications/PDF/prsreviewweb.pdf>

6. The review had a number of key objectives:
- To analyse issues facing tenants of the PRS
 - To identify gaps in the support available to tenants of the PRS
 - To examine issues that may effect landlords who are renting out to tenants
 - To analyse the growing number of private tenants of leaseholders and how the housing partners should interact with such tenants
 - To consider the merits and demerits of possible initiatives such as the Council providing a full management service for leaseholders who are subletting
7. The following methodology for the review was agreed by the Working Group:

Introductory Review Meeting (September 2009)

- Members heard evidence on the current local, regional and national policies relating to the PRS as well as the Council's vision for the sector in the near future.

Issues Effecting Tenants of the PRS

- Members received presentations from the Environmental Health Service, Housing Advice Services and Crisis on the health issues which some tenants face when residing in the PRS.

Private Landlords in the PRS

- Presentations were received from the National Landlords Association, Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum and landlords themselves on some of the issues which landlords involved with the PRS face.

Leasehold Properties being Sub-Leased in the Borough

- The Working Group heard from the Council's Benefits Service, Tower Hamlets Homes and others regarding the high number of leaseholders that are sub-letting their properties and some of the issues which exist.

Private Sector Leasing and the role of RSLs

- Evidence was presented by the Council's Homeless and Housing Advice Services as well as RSLs and Homelessness charities on different models which could be incorporated into the PRS such as intermediate renting and the Council having its own PRS management service.

Background

The National Context

8. The PRS (PRS) can be defined as accommodation that is privately owned (i.e. not owned by a Council or Housing Association) and that is being rented out by a landlord, normally for some profit. The landlord could be an individual or a company. Sometimes management companies or estate agents will manage and let out the property on the owner's behalf. Unlike renting in the social housing sector, most private rental properties are let out on a purely commercial basis, with no allowance for affordability, and typically on relatively insecure, fixed-term contracts. The PRS nationally is complex and includes a number of niches both at the high and low end of the market. These niches include young professions, students, the housing benefits market, slum rentals, high income renters, migrants, asylum seekers and temporary accommodation. The PRS consists of approximately 3.2m households which equates to around 13% of all households³. Even though some see the PRS as a transient sector it is suggested that 21% tend to stay in the PRS for more than five years whilst a further 40% stay for less than a year⁴.
9. The PRS was generally seen as an unregulated sector however since 2002 a number of changes have occurred within the sector to increase regulation. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order in 2002 required all councils to have a Private Sector Renewal Strategy. The Housing Act 2004 introduced a fundamental change to the way local authorities deal with house conditional problems. The Act recognised the council as the primary enforcement agency for conditions of health and safety in the private sector. It introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which directs councils to consider a range of 29 identifiable hazards within dwellings and assesses the risk posed by such hazards. The most serious of hazards is 'Category 1' which the council has a duty to take action to eliminate or significantly reduce.

Rugg Review - the PRS: Its Contribution and Potential

10. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) commissioned an independent review by Julie Rugg entitled *The PRS: Its Contribution and Potential*⁵ in October 2008. The review produced a number of key conclusions:
 - The PRS is a key component of the housing market in England. The flexibility of the PRS needs to be protected.
 - Expansion of the PRS often means a reduction in supply in other parts of the market
 - The task of policing the PRS should be expanded so that the burden does not rest so heavily on the local authority

³ Shelter Presentation, 30th September 2009

⁴ Shelter Presentation, 30th September 2009

⁵<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/publications/PDF/prsreviewweb.pdf>

- The industry has a role to play in promoting accreditation and in ensuring that managing agents offer higher levels of consumer protection to tenants and landlords
- Local authorities should focus on targeting the worst properties and expelling the worst landlords from the market. Policies should concentrate on helping good landlords of all sizes to expand their portfolios (e.g. changes to stamp duty and capital gains tax)

11. In addition to this a number of key findings from the review included that:

- Property conditions in the PRS have been improving, but are still worse than in either social housing or owner occupation.
- There is scope for introducing competition amongst landlords for tenants at the bottom end of the sector. If tenants on Housing Benefit had access to a wider selection of properties, landlords owning the worst quality accommodation would be pushed out of the market or let to those not eligible for Housing Benefit and therefore more vulnerable

12. The review also included a number of recommendations to the government. Some of these included:

- Introducing a light touch licensing system for landlords and mandatory regulation for letting agencies, to increase protection for both vulnerable tenants and good landlords.
- Introducing a new independent complaints and redress procedure for consumers, to help end long drawn out disputes.
- Tax changes to encourage good landlords to grow, including changes to stamp duty to encourage them to buy more properties.
- Looking at ways for the PRS to be more accommodating towards households on lower incomes, including considering more support for landlords prepared to house more vulnerable people.
- Local authorities taking steps to better understand the sector and support good landlords whilst tackling poorly performing landlords and promoting tenants rights.

Government Response to the Rugg Review:

13. The government has announced a number of new initiatives aimed at improving the quality of the PRS by increasing professionalism, driving out bad landlords and strengthening protections for tenants affected by repossessions. In addition to these new proposals, which have been consulted on, the government's responses included:

- Introducing a light-touch national register of every private landlord in England to increase protection for both vulnerable tenants and good landlords. Landlords would need to include their registration number on all tenancy agreements and

could be removed from the register for persistent poor performance like failing to carry out essential repairs, or not protecting tenants' deposits

- Full regulation for private sector letting agents. Letting and managing agents do not currently need to have professional credentials. This means that both tenants and landlords have no realistic redress when things go wrong. To tackle these problems, the government proposed creating an independent regulator for all letting and managing agents
- An improved complaints and redress procedure for tenants. For the first time, the Government would look to set up a mechanism whereby tenants are able to register official complaints about sub-standard landlords, and if these complaints are substantial and proven then landlords may be removed from the national register
- Greater local authority support for good landlords. Local authorities would be encouraged to create 'local lettings agencies' to better facilitate tenancies in the PRS for those in housing need, including Housing Benefit recipients

14. In addition to this the government also announced that tenants will have a minimum of two months notice if they have to leave their home because their landlord has been repossessed.

The Regional Context

15. London's first statutory housing strategy was published on 27 February 2010, embodying the Mayor's vision for housing in London to:

- Raise aspirations and promote opportunity: by producing more affordable homes, particularly for families, and by increasing opportunities for home ownership through the new First Steps housing programme;
- Improve homes and transform neighbourhoods: by improving design quality, by greening homes, by promoting successful, strong and mixed communities and by tackling empty homes;
- Maximise delivery and optimise value for money: by creating a new architecture for delivery, by developing new investment models and by promoting new delivery mechanisms.

16. The strategy makes a number of key points on how to improve the PRS regionally in order to meet its vision '*to promote a vibrant and attractive PRS to support London's economic vitality*'.⁶

17. The strategy highlights the mayor's intention to provide more private rented homes through greater institutional investment with private renting being promoted. The strategy also notes that 45% of all privately rented homes are non-decent compared to 35% of homes across all tenures. The need to improve the quality and access of the PRS will be improved with at least a doubling in the number of accredited landlords by the end of 2011. In addition to this it is also highlighted that

⁶ http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Housing_Strategy_Final_Feb10.pdf

better information on rent levels will be available to those seeking a home in the PRS. Furthermore, the PRS will play a key role in housing homeless and vulnerable households, where it provides high quality housing management and reasonable security of tenure and support is available where needed.

The Local Context

18. There has been a huge increase in the PRS in Tower Hamlets due to the high volume of leaseholders sub-letting their properties and becoming landlords. In 1990 there were 10,000 PRS properties but this has now increased to about 24,000⁷.
19. The responsibility for The PRS in Tower Hamlets is currently divided amongst a number of different services. The Environmental Health Team deal with the enforcement of the Housing Acts including the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Furthermore the Homeless and Housing Advice Service deals with tenants seeking accommodation or experiencing problems with their landlords. They also operate the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme to assist tenants to take up private sector lettings and the Temporary Housing Scheme to provide for the homeless using licensed and leased properties.
20. The Private Housing Improvement Team (PHIT) offers grant aid to landlords to help create dwellings for lettings and to bring long term empty properties back into use. Disabled Facilities Grants are available to private landlords and tenants. Also landlords and tenants may be eligible to apply for Hazard Removal Grants to deal with Category One Hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
21. The Affordable Housing Team identifies empty private properties and works with the owners to bring them back into beneficial use. However, where the owner is unwilling or unable to return the properties to use the Team will use statutory powers, including Compulsory Purchase, to ensure the properties are returned to use. The work of the PHIT and The Affordable Housing Team are covered by the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Empty Property Framework which is in the process of being reviewed.
22. The borough is also a member of the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) which is a pan London scheme to encourage private sector landlords to become more aware of the rules and regulations covering landlord and tenancy issues, health and safety, contracts and property management. The scheme runs training courses for landlords and encourages them to keep up to date with government policies by attending local Landlord Forums. The Council encourages landlords to attend the courses and provides venues and support for the training days. In Tower Hamlets Empty Property Grants are only available to landlords who are LLAS accredited. The Rent Deposit Scheme will only deal directly with LLAS

⁷ Tower Hamlets, Environmental Health Team

accredited landlords. Landlords seeking a HMO License are required to become LLAS accredited to show they can be regarded as a 'fit and proper' person. Tower Hamlets has its own Landlords Forum organised by the Housing Advice Team which is open to all landlords and agents.

23. The **Tower Hamlets Community Plan** suggests that market housing – both to rent and to buy – will remain a key issue. Helping residents to rent homes in the private sector is an important part of this theme and the Partnership is committed to seeing the Decent Homes Standard delivered for vulnerable tenants in the PRS.

24. The **Tower Hamlets Private Sector Renewal Strategy 2004/07 framework** outlined ways of improving the living conditions for owner-occupiers and private sector tenants, mainly by:

- Reducing the number of properties containing category 1 hazards (including Houses in Multiple Occupation) and where possible bringing them up to the Decent Homes Standard.
- Increasing the number of private sector vulnerable tenants living in decent homes.
- Reducing the number of private sector empty properties, bringing certain properties up to Decent Homes Standard and where possible for let through the Council's rent deposit guarantee scheme

25. Furthermore the **Tower Hamlets Housing Strategy 2009/12** includes a number of commitments to the PRS, in particular making sure the PRS is up to decent homes standards. In addition to this further components of the strategy suggest:

- Exploring the feasibility of using additional selective licensing of certain private sector properties in multiple occupation - Some tenants of Right to Buy properties have proven to be perpetrators of anti-social behaviour and a blight in their neighbourhoods. If taken up, this would be used as a final sanction. (action plan timescale: 2009)
- Refreshing the existing Private Sector Renewal Strategy that will deliver decent homes in the PRS and using enabling methods (such as grants, loans and equity release) to achieve a reduction of Category 1 hazards. (action plan timescale: 2010 refresh)
- Tower Hamlets will seek to reduce the number of non-decent homes in the PRS occupied by vulnerable tenants. (action plan timescale: ongoing)
- Delivering the Council's 2008/13 Homelessness Strategy , which includes making the PRS a better option for homeless applicants
- Tower Hamlets will ensure the delivery of a service that will entitle eligible residents to claim Disabled Facilities Grants - this will benefit tenants of private sector landlords

26. The **Homelessness Strategy 2008-13** highlights that rapid economic development alongside persistently high levels of worklessness and deprivation mean that home ownership or the PRS is out of reach for many local residents. The strategy

suggests however to increase access to the PRS and make it a more attractive option:

- As a prevention option, through increased incentives and choice
- Developing a more proactive and assertive options service for households in temporary accommodation
- Facilitating more move-on from hostels into the PRS through a pilot project with Look Ahead Housing and Care and Westminster City Council
- Providing more tenancy support for households in PRS

Key Findings

A number of strategic and operational recommendations have been put forward by the Working Group which cover three key areas including Partnership Working and Efficiency, Health and Housing and the Role of Landlords.

Strategic Recommendations

27. The PRS has generally been seen as an unregulated sector however since 2002 a number of Government legislations has changed this. One such legislation includes the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order in 2002 which requires all Council's to have a Private Sector Renewal Strategy. An issue which was consistent at a number of scrutiny sessions was the lack of up-to-date information on the status of the PRS locally. This meant that Members did not have a clear understanding of what state the sector was currently in and in turn identify what gaps in services potentially existed. The main reasoning behind this was due to the Council's current Private Sector Renewal and Empty Properties Framework 2004-07 being outdated and in need of a refresh. Members were therefore keen for this strategy to be refreshed in order to give an up to date record of the current status of the PRS locally. In addition it was noted that the recommendations from this review should also be incorporated into any future Private Sector Renewal and Empty Properties Strategy.
28. The Council's website suggests that the borough has some of the best and worst private sector housing in the country. The private sector house condition survey carried out in Tower Hamlets in 2002, revealed that a disproportionate number of elderly people in the borough live in the worst of the private sector housing stock. Poor quality housing has a detrimental effect on the health of the people living in those houses and on the quality of life in an area. Elderly or vulnerable homeowners do not always have the necessary resources to keep their homes in good repair without assistance
29. The Council's holistic stock condition survey was last completed in 2000. However, the stock database has been periodically updated with capital works refurbishment carried on affected properties. Recently, Tower Hamlets Homes in agreement with the Council, commissioned a stock condition survey for 1500 properties on top of the 300 done earlier in the year.
30. Members were keen to find out what the current status of the PRS was and what percentage of the PRS stock was currently up to decant home standard however with the last private sector condition survey taking place in 2002 and with constant changes in the housing sector locally it was difficult to tell. Members felt that it was important that the Council undertook a full private sector condition survey in order to greater understand what issues are currently being faced within the sector and also to provide an evidence base for both the upcoming Private Sector Housing Strategy and the update to the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Empty Properties Framework. It was suggested that funds should be made available for a full Private

Sector Condition survey to be carried out in order to identify, analyse and understand the current status of the PRS locally.

- R1 That the Development and Renewal Directorate develops a new Private Sector Housing Strategy which incorporates recommendations from this review and issues highlighted in the Housing Strategy and Housing and Homelessness Strategy
- R2 That the Development and Renewal Directorate undertake a full Private Sector Condition Survey to provide an evidence base for the Private Sector Housing Strategy and the update to the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Empty Properties Framework

31. Members discussed how to drive out poor landlords and rogue agents who know that their properties are in bad condition but have no intention of improving them. Members of the Working Group discussed how good landlords could overtake the work of poor landlords in the management of properties and even an Arms Length Management Organisation could potentially do this rather than the Council.
32. The idea that the Council explore providing a full management service particularly aimed at leaseholders that sub-let their properties was discussed during a number of sessions. The Working Group felt that the Council, Tower Hamlets Homes and RSLs should work together and build a partnership to manage properties, with Lambeth's Lettings First being highlighted as a possible model of best practice. Furthermore, Members also felt that an in-house management agent was needed so the Council knew who was living in properties and in turn reduce the number of absentee landlords.
33. Lambeth Council set up Lettings First⁸ to provide a link between social and private housing. The aims of the Lettings First Agency were to provide a service to customers who wish to rent or let properties in the PRS. As well as assisting customers to rent homes in the PRS, Lettings First also offers advice and assistance to both landlords and letting agents. They are involved in many aspects of the PRS including Landlord Accreditation, HMO licensing and Decent Homes Standards.
34. Lambeth Council has a partnership with Avenue Lettings, who are part of the Amicus Housing Group. Avenue Lettings has over ten years of experience in providing and managing Private Sector properties for short term accommodation. This experience has proved priceless for the Council in establishing this programme. Avenue Lettings are experts in many aspects of property management and provide a quality service and is unique in that they unite the private and public sectors in order to meet needs and demands.
35. In Tower Hamlets up to 40% of leaseholders sublease their properties although

⁸<http://www.lettingsfirst.com/index.php?id=62>

there is no accurate record of whose living where. It was however suggested that this information is available through Land Registry. Tower Hamlets Homes presented the current levels of leasehold properties that were being subleased to private tenants. Tower Hamlets Homes manages approximately 22,000 properties of which 40% are leasehold. In turn a quarter of those are being sub-let to private tenants.

36. A number of issues and challenges were highlighted including the service not knowing who resides in all properties within the borough and hence the full extent of the number of properties being sub-leased. Tower Hamlets Homes is looking into finding out this information and has sent out two questionnaires to all leaseholders to obtain details of unknown sub-lets. They have also commissioned an external company to conduct a telephone survey to collate diversity information.

37. Tower Hamlets Homes have a number of plans for the future which include:

- Campaign to all leaseholders to identify sublets which will include making direct contact with the occupier
- Promote buy-in to gas servicing contract for landlord safety check: reminder potential manslaughter charge
- Continue to send out questionnaire with quarterly statements and estimates/ actuals to identify new sublets and gather information on the tenants.
- Information sharing with neighbourhood teams to help deal with anti social behaviour
- Produce sub-tenants handbook

38. Members felt that the Council should explore the feasibility of providing a full management service for leaseholders that sub-let their properties; Members suspected that there could be a critical mass of non-residential Council leaseholders to make this financially viable. It was suggested that the borough should seek to adopt a similar service for PRS as that of Lambeth's Lettings First which not only provides information and advice but also provides a full management service.

R3 That the Development and Renewal Directorate, Tower Hamlets Homes and local Registered Social Landlords explore the feasibility of providing a full management service for leaseholders that sub-let their properties

39. A number of challenges face the Environmental Health Team. The team consists of 8 members of staff which have to deal with both PRS issues and a high number of RSL complaints. The new Housing Health and Safety Rating System inspections policy with the 29 hazards assessment also meant more time being consumed by officers on this. Another issue which was complex and time consuming was HMO licensing although good landlords were the ones who proactively applied for this. Finally also highlighted was the difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified Environmental Health Officers and Technical Officers. Mostly agency staffs were

being used at present. The issue with using graduates was that a log book was needed for them to be registered and qualified which tends to take time to devise.

40. A best practice initiative mentioned at the session included that of Liverpool Council who successfully managed to secure revenue funding from the PCT and Fire Brigade specifically to aid the work of Environmental Health in order to collectively and efficiently deal with issues arising from the PRS. It was suggested that the Council should look into this model and increase the partnership working between the various services, particularly with public sector finances expected to be cut in 2011-12.
41. Liverpool City Council's Healthy Homes Programme (HHP) was launched to prevent death and illness due to poor housing conditions and accidents in the home. It is mainly aimed at the PRS and helps many of the most vulnerable residents in Liverpool. In 2006, the House Condition and Energy Survey found that 5.7% of Liverpool's housing stock is unfit, compared to the national figure of 4.2%. Accidental injuries in Liverpool are the eighth major cause of death in the city. The Healthy Homes Programme in Liverpool is carried out by the Public Protection Business Unit who use environmental health powers to tackle unhealthy and unsafe housing conditions. The programme includes working with partners such as the PCT, Merseyside Fire and Rescue and the voluntary sector in order to reduce health inequalities and winter deaths, and in turn increase life expectancy.
42. In addition to this, the Healthy Homes Programme uses a comprehensive questionnaire to identify specific needs of each tenant and then co-ordinate the delivery of a range of support services to improve their quality of life. Help given include advice on:
- Healthy eating.
 - Home safety.
 - Fuel poverty.
 - How to get help from a number of different agencies and how to maximise income
43. Members of the Working Group were keen for the Council to explore greater partnership working with those local services which are impacted upon due to health and safety issues in the PRS as well as the introduction of a Healthy Homes Programme. Both these were seen as initiatives to reduce health inequalities which plague the lower end of the PRS. The Working Group heard that a Healthy Housing Link is already something the Council is exploring and looking into but Members were still keen for this to be actively set up.

44.

R4 That the Communities, Localities and Culture Directorate develops a partnership strategy which includes NHS Tower Hamlets, the London Fire Brigade and the third sector to deal with homes in poor condition. This should include the sharing of resources as highlighted by the Healthy Homes programme in Liverpool City Council

Operational Recommendations

45. The Working Group heard from the Homeless and Housing Advice Service who suggested that the PRS can be better utilised and this is a great opportunity to build a relationship with this large and important sector in the borough. Members agreed and stated that more of those residing in hostels should be encouraged to move into the PRS as this would aid those who are at risk of re-offending or relapsing
46. In addition to this, Members felt that Hostels were not always appropriate for all groups taking into consideration cultural and gender issues. The Working Group noted the 2006/07 scrutiny review on the Tower Hamlets Hostel Strategy which made a number of recommendations to increase access for people into hostels. The review also noted that the hostel population didn't fully reflect the diversity of the borough's population.
47. Furthermore, Crisis and Shelter stated that as hostels were usually full and local housing not possible the PRS needs to be better utilised as more support was needed to increase the awareness of this sector and make it stronger. This is also consistent with a report by the London Housing Foundation⁹ which states that there is no prospect of social housing meeting all of the move-on needs of hostels and supported housing residents and hence there was a need to expand the use of the PRS. Currently only around 11 per cent of residents leaving London hostels were moving into the PRS.

R5 That the Development and Renewal Directorate commit to utilising PRS stock to its full capacity instead of using Bed and Breakfast and Hostels where possible

48. The Housing Act 2004 introduced fundamental changes to the PRS and in particular housing condition problems with the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Houses of Multiple Occupations (HMOs) were most likely to be of a health risk to tenants. According to the Council's Housing Strategy 2009-12, currently HMOs with three or more storeys and with five or more occupants are covered by the mandatory licensing scheme brought in under the 2004 Act. Smaller (non-mandatory) HMOs on social housing estates are typically ex-Right to Buy properties owned by distant landlords and sublet to private tenants. Some tenants of these properties have proven to be perpetrators of anti-social behaviour and blight in their neighbourhoods.
49. The government in January 2010¹⁰ announced new local powers to control the spread of high concentrations of shared rented homes and to tackle pockets of unsafe and substandard accommodation run by bad landlords. These new powers

⁹ Improving Access to the PRS for Homeless Single People in London, London Housing Foundation, Geoffrey Randall, March 2008

¹⁰ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/housing/1447621>

also include changes to the planning rules, giving local authorities the powers to manage the development of HMOs in their area, in turn helping stem the growth of large pockets of shared homes - which can change the balance and nature of communities.

50. In addition to this and as a result of the Rugg review the government has also proposed to give general consent for councils to introduce licensing schemes, without seeking permission from Central Government, in hotspot areas where landlords do not maintain or manage their properties properly. Members were keen for the Council to look into developing such landlord licensing schemes and a general consent would ensure that decisions on the quality of rented homes are made by those who are aware of the local issues and needs of the community.

R6 That the Environmental Health Team implements the new powers given to local authorities which allows the licensing of all landlords including those with Houses of Multiple Occupations (HMOs)

51. The review included a specific session which looked at the role of private landlords in the borough's PRS. At the session Members heard evidence from the National Landlords Association (NLA), Queen Mary College, the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum and the borough's Family Rent Deposit Scheme. Also in attendance at the session were Directors of some local Landlords including Hamletts and ElliotLeigh.
52. The Tower Hamlets Landlord Forum is an essential point of contact between the Council and the PRS to enable the exchange of ideas and allow discussion between people who are promoting and developing a partnership between providers and regulators. The forum currently meets three times a year and key experts from the Council, private businesses and other landlord organisations are encouraged to contribute at the meetings.
53. Benefits of joining the forum include training and being made aware of the current government policies and legislations relating to the PRS as well as learning from other landlords experiences. In addition to this there is an opportunity to work towards accredited Continuous Professional Development points. It was discussed that bad landlords tended to be concentrated in the lower end of the PRS market and were due to their ignorance rather than not wanting to do anything and in turn just needed support and signposting, which the Landlords Forum could deliver.
54. This was echoed by David Hewitt (Shelter, Housing Development Manager) who also suggested that this was due to landlord's ignorance rather than having poor quality properties on purpose and not wanting to do anything about them. Greater information and advice was needed for both tenants and landlords. It was suggested that the role of the Council should be to engage more with landlords through advice and driving out bad landlords. A number of landlords were also not accredited which

was an issue and in turn were not aware of the basic legal responsibilities including those of health and safety.

55. Some of the issues that the Landlords Forum is currently facing include the small numbers that attend or are engaged, at present 20-30 landlords/agents attend the sessions. This is taking into consideration that 1000 invites were sent out in 2007 when the forum was launched and 100 landlords attended the first session. Members felt that more publicity should be introduced to encourage landlords to engage with the landlords Forum and in turn take up some of the accredited courses it delivers, namely the London Landlord Accredited Scheme (LLAS). Members and Officers felt that the accreditation scheme should not be just a one day course but needs to include continuous learning and development on aspects such as new government legislation.
56. Further challenges that were noted during the session included poor landlords being heard about but not seen. It was suggested that the Council should publicise a list of local landlords on its website which it endorses and are accredited, as is done by the London Borough of Newham. It was however difficult to identify how many landlords in the borough were accredited although it was estimated to be around 260.
57. As an incentive it was suggested that landlords who were accredited and seen as good landlords could be offered benefits which range from publicity in Council literature to increase awareness of and help in accessing grant or loan funding to improve the quality and energy efficiency of the PRS
58. Members discussed a points system could also be introduced where landlords who are poor and tally up a specific amount of points are struck off the list. Such a register was also supported through the Rugg Reviews summary of consultation responses compiled by the Department for Communities and Local Government. It is suggested that although the main landlord organisations expressed cautious support, housing charities such as Crisis and Shelter were strongly supportive. Furthermore, the Working Group heard that Queen Mary College also have a list of landlords which it uses with the notion if any landlord receives two complaints they are struck off the list.
59. Landlord registrations at Queen Mary College number 150 or so each year, with 40 of these being new registrations. This number has seen a 50% increase, due to the recession, to bring the total number of new landlords registering since May 2009 to 62. Queen Mary does not use any advertising medium to promote this service. Registration fees cost £20 per property per year.

The College has a database which is essential to allow students access to:

- Affordable rents
- No fees to tenants
- Better negotiated contract lengths
- Speedier response to repair issues
- Direct intervention from the Residences Office on a tenant's behalf.

60. There was a need to better use the Council's website which was seen as relatively poor compared to neighbouring boroughs such as Newham as well as the use of various local media in promoting the Landlords Forum and the benefits in attending. In addition to this it was suggested that the Council should build and develop the profile of the Forum through the use of a "*Landlord of the Year*" Award. Members suggested that this could even go one step further with the introduction of a range of housing awards which also take into consideration Registered Social Landlords and Tenants and local Leaseholder Associations.
61. The huge importance of the PRS locally was noted and the need for landlords to be involved in local decision making on a strategic level. With this it was felt that a representative from the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum should sit on the *Great Place to Live Community Plan Delivery Group*. Members were keen for the sector to have a voice within the borough considering the contribution it makes locally as well as the possibilities around the greater use of the sector.
62. A further issue which was highlighted by the landlord's forum was that many Tower Hamlets landlords or agents operated in other local authorities and attend the Forum where they reside at rather than where their properties are. This made it difficult to engage with a number of landlords. With this, Members suggested that the Landlords Forum should explore developing a regional Landlords Forum in partnership with the other local authorities. This would not only allow greater engagement with those landlords who reside outside of the borough but would also encourage the sharing of best practice and resources amongst local authorities in order to tackle cross borough and London wide issues.

- R7 That the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum uses local media to increase awareness of the benefits of the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) and publicises which local landlords are accredited and registered on its website
- R8 That the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum and Tower Hamlets Homes publicise the Landlords Forum through the greater use of local media and an annual "*Landlord of the Year*" award
- R9 That a representative from the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum have a standing invitation on the Great Place to Live Community Plan Delivery Group
- R10 That the Development and Renewal Directorate support private landlords access grant or loan funding to improve the quality and energy efficiency of the PRS
- R11 That the Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum takes lead in exploring the development of a regional landlord's forum

63. Members noted that discussions took place with regards to the need for a Housing Benefits Officer to be based with the Housing Advice Team, to advise on aspects of the Rent Deposit Scheme, for a few days a week although this request was turned down. However, it was later suggested that the officer may have limited work to do. Members were keen to find out why this was the case and if there was a need for an officer to be based with the Housing Advice Team, then it should potentially be looked into again.
64. Members at the session heard a number of concerns from landlords relating to the payment of Housing Benefits to them from the Council through tenants. It was highlighted that Tower Hamlets were either the only or one of a few local authorities in London who still paid housing benefits through cheques and not BACs; this had a knock on effect on landlords due to late payments.
65. Another concern included the notion that housing benefits were being paid straight to tenants through the new system, this again meant that landlords were receiving payments late. Further potential problems included when tenants were in overdraft and half of their housing benefit was taken away to pay for overdraft fines. This again had a knock on effect on landlords receiving payments. Also highlighted was that the local authority does not email its schedule of payments and this goes through the post which potentially delays things and again has an effect on landlords.
66. Members heard from the Housing Benefits Services on the current local housing benefit policies along with the national aims of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which included the notion of personal responsibility as part of the government's agenda to tackle the perception of "a nanny state". Furthermore, the aims of the LHA on a local level encouraged aspects such as financial inclusion through residents opening bank accounts and an improved and faster process by the housing benefit service.
67. Key aspects of LHA payments were also highlighted, in particular that the LHA should go to the tenant and not the landlord which has been made clear by government. There is however some instances where it can be paid to the landlord if the local authority consider the tenant to have difficulties in managing their affairs; however there is a requirement by the local authority to regularly review this. The local authority must pay the landlord in instances where the tenant has rent arrears of 8 weeks or more and where the Department for Work and Pensions are making deductions from any income support or jobseekers allowance to pay of rent arrears.
68. It was highlighted that Payment of LHA is through either bank cheque or BACs. The latter is now encouraged with the service producing information and advice for tenants on opening a bank account. The service is committed to moving to BACs and this is currently available to landlords as part of a phased approach. However this may create some issues with vulnerable claimants in wanting to open up a bank account. In terms of schedules the service emails this to RSLs and landlords upon

request, however this is resource intensive as the current IT system is not designed for mailing. In addition it is also a legal requirement for Council's to post a hard copy of schedules to landlords.

69. The service has a number of new initiatives in place at the moment including the use of new technology mobile tablets which are used during home visits in order to reduce the number of defective claims. The service also has future initiatives in the pipeline including the use of a new on-line claim form which would drastically reduce the current 22 day turnaround; there has also been positive feedback here from customers.

R12 The Housing Benefits Service continue moving from a process of paying housing benefits through cheques to payments through BACs

R13 The Housing Benefits Service explore the possibility of sending schedules of payment to landlords through email along with written copies to increase efficiency

R14 That the Housing Benefits Services and Housing Advice Service explore the possibility of a Benefits Officer being based within the Housing Advice Team

Conclusion

70. The PRS has been described as being very complex with many sub-divisions and in turn devising recommendations for the sector is challenging, particularly in an era where housing policy is constantly changing.
71. The Working Group recognised the good work that is already being delivered by the Council and its partners with regards to the PRS and in particular the services of the Private Sector and Affordable Housing Team, The Environmental Health Team, The Housing Benefits Services and the Homeless and Housing Advice Services.
72. In addition to these the Working Group heard from external organisations such as Tower Hamlets Homes, the National Landlords Association and Queen Mary College. Registered Social Landlords including Poplar HARCA and East Thames Housing also gave evidence. Furthermore national charities Praxis, Shelter, Crisis and Look Ahead put forward their experiences of the PRS.
73. A number of recommendations have been put forward for consideration. At the heart of these recommendations include the need to develop a new Private Sector Housing Strategy in order to understand and analyse the current status of the sector locally. The review recognised that the private sector can no longer be the sector of default but rather needs to be the sector of choice for many of our local residents. Furthermore, there was a need to move away from a policy of enforcement to one of self regulation by increasing our support for good landlords. There was a need to publicise the work of good landlords and endorse them on the Council's website. Good landlords should also be supported in accessing grant or loan funding to improve the quality and energy efficiency of their properties. Members felt that landlords should also have a greater voice by having a standing invitation on the Great Place to Live Community Plan Delivery Group.
74. With expected cuts in public services looming the Working Group suggested the urgent need to work in greater partnership with organisations who have an interest and are effected by the PRS and in particular the issues relating to Health and Housing. Members were also keen for the borough to explore developing models to see the feasibility of providing a full management service for those leaseholders that are sub-letting their properties.
75. On a final note, the Working Group hope that the recommendations of this report go some way in strengthening the PRS for the benefit of both tenants and landlords in the borough and provide a real alternative to many of the residents seeking sustainable housing in Tower Hamlets.

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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Agenda Item 9.2

Committee Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date 6 th April 2010	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): Afazul Hoque Scrutiny Policy Manager		Title: <i>Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Strengthening Local Community Leadership</i> Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Strengthening Local Community Leadership Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Agree the draft report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Service Head for Scrutiny and Equalities to amend the final report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (AS AMENDED) SECTION 100D

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

Background paper	Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection
None	N/A

3. Background

- 3.1 To meet the challenges facing Tower Hamlets we know that the Council alone cannot achieve the outcomes which residents, councillors and partners desire. At the same time the local authority has a clear community leadership role to play. The challenge is to do this in partnership with other agencies and organisations. Recent proposals from central government are challenging us to think about what we might need to do to strengthen community leadership and participation.
- 3.2 The Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets identified strengthening local community leadership as the key review for 2009/10 municipal year. In addressing the challenges posed by proposals from central government the review set out to do the following:
- Develop Member awareness of national drivers for strengthening the leadership role of Councillors;
 - Consider the response to the Strengthening Local Democracy consultation paper focusing on strengthening scrutiny of partnerships;
 - Develop proposals for strengthening local democracy and external scrutiny in the wider place shaping contest;
 - Test whether the CCfA proposal will be useful to Members in identifying local problems and developing local solutions;
 - Explore the use of CCfA with residents to ensure it will work for them;
 - Identify support for Members in exercising their community leadership role and in implementing CCfA.
- 3.3 The Working Group held a number of evidence gathering sessions with officers from the Council and various local stakeholders. This review specifically tested our local proposal for Councillor Call for Action which includes the development of a Performance Digest Report. The Working Group held a workshop with a number of local residents to explore how intractable issues can be resolved. It was noted that many of these issues do not have easy solutions and scrutiny provides a platform to bring together all the stakeholders to discuss those issues.
- 3.4 A number of recommendations have been put forward for consideration by the Council and Partnership. At the heart of these recommendations include the need to develop a new model of community leadership to support Members to engage with local residents more fully, secondly to increase resident participation in the democratic process and finally improve the partnership process.
- 3.5 The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix A. Once agreed, the Working Groups report will be submitted to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations.

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

- 4.1. The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 (“the LGA 2000”) to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have

executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for Cabinet to provide a response.

- 4.2. The report contains recommendations which are capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. The councillor call for action process is consistent with the Council's obligations under the LGA 2000 and raising awareness about it is an appropriate incidental matter. Community leadership is otherwise closely aligned with the key Community Plan theme of One Tower Hamlets and it may be possible to justify action by reference to the Council's well-being power in section 2 of the LGA 2000. If Cabinet supported the recommendations, it would be for officers to ensure that any action is carried out lawfully.

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 This report describes the review and recommendations of the Strengthening Local Community Leadership Working Group.
- 5.2 There are no specific financial implications emanating from this report but in the event that the Council agrees further action in response to this report's recommendations then officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

6. One Tower Hamlets consideration

- 6.1 This review explored a key aspect of One Tower Hamlets to strengthen community leadership. All the recommendations from the review aim to strengthen community leadership and increase resident engagement in the democratic process. This will also improve community cohesion in the borough.

7. Risk Management

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

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Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Strengthening Local Community Leadership



**London Borough of Tower Hamlets
February 2010**

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Acknowledgments

The Working Group would like to thank all the officers and residents that supported this review. The views and perspectives of all that were involved have been fundamental in shaping the final recommendations of this report.

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External

Nico Heller – The Democracy School

Local Residents & Groups

The Working Group also received contributions from the following:

LAP Steering Group Members

Ocean Somali Community Organisation (OSCA)

Students and Staff from Central Foundation Girls School

Older People's Reference Group

Tower Hamlets Local Involvement Network Members

Chair's Foreword

**Cllr Ann Jackson
Scrutiny Lead, One Tower Hamlets**

Recommendations

The Working Group recommendations focus on three areas requiring consideration and action from the Council, Tower Hamlets Partnership and local community leaders. The recommendations are presented as a useful starting point for improving local community leadership to support the aim of achieving One Tower Hamlets.

DEVELOPING NEW MODEL OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Recommendation 1

That the Council develops a programme to raise awareness amongst Members, residents and other stakeholders of the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) process.

Recommendation 2

That the Council further develops the Performance Digest report to enable a more comprehensive understanding of residents' concerns at both a borough wide and LAP level.

Recommendation 3

That the Partnership develops local scrutiny with a problem-solving focus through LAP Steering Groups and links this in with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation 4

That the Council develops a programme to improve Councillors' links with third sector and partner organisations, focusing on enhancing their ward level leadership role.

Recommendation 5

That the Council continues to develop programmes to support Community Leaders at all level including targeted work with minority and new communities.

Recommendation 6

That the Council develops Member Champion roles on key areas such as the equalities strands to ensure those areas are promoted at strategic and local level.

Recommendation 7

That the Council develops a comprehensive Induction Programme for new Councillors including allocating Senior Officers to each Councillor to help them navigate around the Council.

RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

Recommendation 8

That the Council develops innovative communication mechanisms such as use of social media and developing councillors website to highlight their work including how local residents can work with Councillors to shape their area.

Recommendation 9

That the Council rolls out a programme of formal meetings at different community locations within the borough.

Recommendation 10

That the Council reviews the way petitions are managed and develops a more comprehensive system for receiving and responding to petitions.

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Recommendation 11

That the Partnership reviews how the Local Area Partnership (LAP) structures involve Councillors more effectively by utilising their democratic mandate and relationships with their constituents, for example helping to accessing 'hard to reach' sections of the community and communicating with residents in more open ways. .

Recommendation 12

That the Partnership reviews the way work programmes and agendas are being set at LAP Steering Groups to ensure it has a more local focus and encourages other residents to attend.

Recommendation 13

That the Council undertakes a feasibility study to explore allocating ward budgets to local Councillors.

Introduction

1. To meet the challenges facing Tower Hamlets we know that the Council alone cannot achieve the outcomes which residents, Councillors and partners desire. At the same time the local authority has a clear community leadership role to play. The challenge is to do this in partnership with other agencies and organisations. Recent proposals from central government are challenging us to think about what we might need to do to strengthen community leadership and participation.
2. This review aimed to address these challenges and in particular how the process of Scrutiny can be a key driver to make this happen. Residents must be able to engage with the Council and the democratic process to tell us what outcomes they want.
3. Scrutiny reviews always aspire to focus on issues of concern to residents. The actions arising often fall outside the remit of the Council and need partner engagement even from those who may not be under any duty through the Local Area Agreement. To obtain the right outcomes for residents, we need to strengthen our wider partnerships and explore how our scrutiny powers can help us do this. Residents are not overly concerned with who is responsible for what, they want to see effective local services helping to make the borough a great place to live. The community leadership of Members has the potential to facilitate this precisely because of their democratic mandate. Realising this potential will be important for all concerned.
4. Our experience of the Health Scrutiny Panel and the relationships we have established shows how good joint working has the potential to benefit local residents through accelerating improvements in health. Last year's Child Poverty Scrutiny Review developed and tested a community leadership model which explored the relationship between members and their constituents. It also reflected on how to extract the kind of local information that helps make this happen. Combining good quality local information from statutory agencies and that which Members glean from their ward work has the potential to deliver a more dynamic problem solving approach to what often appear to be intractable issues. Thinking through the different relationships and how we use the information we have are the fundamental issues at the heart of this review.
5. In addressing these issues, the review therefore set out to do the following:
 - Develop Member awareness of national drivers for strengthening the leadership role of Councillors;
 - Consider the response to the Strengthening Local Democracy consultation

- paper focusing on strengthening scrutiny of partnerships;
- Develop proposals for strengthening local democracy and external scrutiny in the wider place shaping contest
 - Test whether the CCfA proposal will be useful to Members in identifying local problems and developing local solutions;
 - Explore the use of CCfA with residents to ensure it will work for them;
 - Identify support for Members in exercising their community leadership role and in implementing CCfA.

6. The group agreed the following timetable for the review:

Introductory review meeting (November 2009)

- Agree scoping document
- Background – National & Local Drivers
- Local Democracy in Tower Hamlets
- Leading through Partnership
- Response to Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation

Councillor Call for Action (November 2009)

- Background to CCfA
- Performance Digest
- CCfA Members Workshop

CCfA Workshop with local residents (December 2009)

- The role of Community Leaders
- Community Leadership in Action

Discussion so far (January 2010)

- Issues arising from meetings with local residents
- Draft recommendations

Final Meeting (February 2010)

- Draft Report

Background

National context

7. The *Strengthening Local Democracy* consultation paper¹ explores the role and powers of local councillors, focusing on councils as key drivers of localised improvements by strengthening their mandate to act on behalf of residents. The principle is that 'citizens have the right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and their communities'. Strengthening local democracy could happen in the following five ways:
 - Greater power to councils to scrutinise the spending and decisions of local service providers;
 - Removing barriers to councils using existing powers;
 - Enhancing powers of councils to deal with climate change;
 - Exploring powers and responsibilities of sub-regional structures
 - Developing relationship between central and local government
8. The paper sees councils as the local point of accountability achieved by giving elected leaders greater responsibility on behalf of constituents to scrutinise and influence decisions made by all spenders of public money. As already articulated, health scrutiny is well established in Tower Hamlets. The challenge is to build similar relationships with other partners. This review will use our local response to the consultation to work out how best to do this.
9. Set against a back-drop of declining voter turnout and with citizens feeling that Councillors do not represent their views, the White Paper, *Communities in Control: real people, real power*² aspires to shift power, influence and responsibility into communities and individuals. If services do not meet the highest standards, citizens should be able to complain and seek redress and local authorities need to have clear systems of redress in place. The proposed new duty to respond to petitions gives petitioners the power to influence local level issues. It proposes that where a response to a petition is not satisfactory, it can be debated in full council. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Police and Justice Act 2006 introduced powers allowing Members to call for debate and discussion around local level concerns through the CCfA.
10. Designed to sit alongside existing mechanisms and be used when all other attempts at resolution have failed the Council has developed a local model proposed to allow Members to use local level information to discuss concerns in a

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localdemocracyconsultation>

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol>

problem solving capacity. This proposal incorporates the use of information obtained through members enquires, corporate complaints, Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and petitions.

11. The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) framework places a key role on Community Leaders shaping their local area and working in partnership to do so. In particular it envisages the role of non-executive members to become more critical as community champions and offers them the opportunity to feed in local perceptions of existing services and outstanding issues. CAA also offers scrutiny a range of opportunities to develop its role of examining the work of local service providers and helping to deliver the priorities set out in the Community Plan and measured through the delivery of the LAA. For example scrutiny agenda can investigate any significant shortcomings that CAA might find.
12. The Councillors' Commission report published in 2007 highlighted a number of underlying principles outlining the importance of the relationship between citizens and state, a key facet of community leadership. These are:
 1. Local authorities are key to promoting local democratic engagement;
 2. Promoting a sense of efficacy is key to better engagement;
 3. Councillors are most effective when they have similar life experiences to their constituents;
 4. Key to effective local representation is the relationship between councillors and their constituents;
 5. Being a Councillor should be made less daunting and be better supported.

Local context

13. Tower Hamlets has a track record on exploring difficult issues with local residents. Positive comments in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (2008) on the role of Overview and Scrutiny highlighted its strength in pro-active leadership. Members are fundamental to this. The 2008/09 Annual Residents' Survey showed that 46% of residents felt they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This is a decrease of 2% on the previous year (48%) and a decrease of 8% from 2005/06 (54%). In contrast, the Place Survey undertaken by Ipsos MORI shows a decrease of 9% between 2006/07 (47%) and 2008/09 (35.7%).
14. Tower Hamlets compares favourably on this indicator to London (35%) and national (28.9%). In considering the Place Survey results it needs to be borne in mind the relatively low response rate and the likelihood of response bias. Despite this the Working Group felt strongly that this can be improved by listening to residents and using the information we obtain from them to find local solutions.

The importance of participatory decision making is a key concern for Members to ensure residents feel empowered and take control of shaping their local area.

15. Members' community leadership role is strengthened by their representative composition. Tower Hamlets bucks the national trend by continuing to attract younger people as Councillors - 86% of Councillors are under 50 - reflecting the borough's younger than average population. 63% of Councillors are from BME backgrounds, including the Leader of the Council. Many work either full or part-time. Their experiences therefore echo their constituents. They are keen to find the right solutions to local problems and involve residents in the democratic process to do so.

16. This review has built on the review undertaken in 2006 which considered the role of councillors in the Tower Hamlets Partnership and specifically focused on how to enhance democratic accountability. Among its conclusions the review illustrated how councillors can access harder to reach sections of the community and talk to their constituents in a more straightforward way than professional officers. These attributes are important elements of community leadership. This is now embedded in the new Partnership structure with councillors given a greater status. They have a greater role on LAP Steering Groups and Cabinet Members co-chair the Partnership's Community Plan Delivery Groups (CPDG). The Partnership is well established and brings together residents, Members, business, voluntary and community organisations and statutory public services. However, the Working Group noted that the communication between LAPs and CPDGs is not as effective as it could be and there is a need to strengthen this to ensure local needs and priorities are addressed and also agree local activities and projects that will deliver these local priorities.

One Tower Hamlets Consideration

17. Last year's Scrutiny Review on Child Poverty developed and tested a community leadership model. Members used the model to develop a better understanding of the experiences of local residents and used the information to influence policy and service development. Members identified residents who collectively might represent the diversity of Tower Hamlets and interviewed them about their experiences of child poverty. Becoming known as the One Tower Hamlets Interviews, this model has not been developed or tested elsewhere. Members have found it a useful way to identify local needs and link resident experiences and concerns with service development. A number of recommendations were made based on these interviews.

18. The Child Poverty review highlighted the important role Community Leaders can play in developing equality and cohesion in bringing forward areas of local concerns. This review provided the opportunity to support the development of Community Leaders through consideration of new areas to enhance the role of non-executive councillors.
19. The experience from the Members Diversity and Equalities Working Group also highlights how Members have a key role in finding solutions to potentially difficult and contentious issues. A key element of the borough's Community Plan theme of One Tower Hamlets is to strengthen community leadership and this review allowed Members to have a discussion with officers and local residents on how this could be developed.
20. The Equality Framework for Local Government ³places leadership and partnership at the heart of their assessment. The leadership of our Members has been fundamental in our progress on diversity and equality making Tower Hamlets making the borough one of the best performing authorities in the country.

³ <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9499336>

Findings

DEVELOPING A NEW MODEL OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

21. A vibrant local democracy should encompass many different types of community leadership. In supporting Councillors to play their part it would be useful to define what community leadership means in relation to the role of citizens and the role of elected representatives and tackle any questions about a conflict between participative and representative democracy.
22. While community leadership has always been part of what councils have done, the Local Government Act 2000 enshrined the community leadership role in law for the first time. The legislation has given councils a new power 'to do anything' to promote the wellbeing of their area as a whole – encouraging councils to look beyond immediate service delivery responsibilities to the wider economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas – and requires councils to develop a strategy for their community with local people and partner organisations.
23. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) outlines 8 characteristics of effective community leadership:
 - Listening to and involving communities
 - Building vision and direction
 - Making things happen
 - Standing up for communities
 - Empowering local communities
 - Accountability to communities
 - Using community resources effectively
24. The role of elected Members is unique because of its democratic mandate. This gives weight to their decisions and the accountability they can demand in making them – as well as the judgment that can be made of them by their electors at the ballot box. Non-executive Members in particular have opportunities to provide ward level leadership as they are likely to have more time to do this than their Cabinet colleagues. There are different roles and purposes of community leadership and they can be both complementary and at odds with each other. It would be useful for the role of councillors to be defined in relation to other types of community leadership. This could help recognise that councillors can play a unique role in facilitating dialogue between local people and service providers. This would help to shape Member learning and development opportunities in order to inform the development of activities around increasing participation and engagement of local people.

Councillor Call for Action

25. Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (LGPIH) Act 2007 includes provisions for CCfA that came into force on 1st April 2009. This means the Council is now under statutory obligation to provide Members the opportunity to refer to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) any local government matter where other methods of resolution have been exhausted. In its aspiration to empower local councillors to respond more effectively to the needs of their communities, the CCfA fits closely with our realisation of the Community Plan, particularly its overarching theme of 'One Tower Hamlets'. CCfA offers a key opportunity to coordinate activity across the three objectives of One Tower Hamlets: reducing inequality, strengthening cohesion, and strengthening community leadership. Linked closely to Comprehensive Area Assessment, CCfA will also be a key tool in building a sense of people and place, and helping to deliver better outcomes for residents.
26. To realise these objectives the Council has attempted to devise a workable local solution within the wider context of how residents can raise their concerns and further enhance how we 'involve' them more widely. This gives the opportunity to:
 - Improve how residents can get a say in what's happening particularly about what's not working
 - Refine and refresh systems for raising concerns to improve their operation and ensure that they actually produce better results
 - Improve the information provided to councillors about what is not working and the major issues arising from this in order to use their community leadership as part of the problem-solving process
27. This local model has been designed to avoid the creation of an overly bureaucratic process. Crucially success will also be dependent on the willingness of officers and Members to adopt a problem-solving approach that recognises their different perspectives. Getting this right would enable us to have a more sophisticated way of tackling problems and recognising that finding sustainable solutions is often complex. Last year this approach was tested with the Members' Diversity and Equality Working Group to explore controversial issues including Preventing Violent Extremism, Homophobic Hate Crime and working with new residents. This approach proved to be more energising and led to improved engagement of Members with the Police on PVE, increased understanding about working with new communities and saw them taking a more active role in LGBT issues.
28. Guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny suggests that the best authorities will use this opportunity to look more generally at all the ways in which Councillors are empowered to resolve problems local to their ward, with CCfA as a last resort once all other processes have been exhausted. At the same time we need to be mindful that this 'last resort' is itself relative to the effectiveness of how services respond overall.

29. In larger terms, this necessitates clarifying what all the processes for raising concerns are, how they relate to each other, and making sure they are as effective as possible. The aspiration is for a robust process to exist as an entirety, with issues that would benefit from extra attention from scrutiny being able to rise to the surface, whilst those issues which are best dealt with through others means being signposted accordingly. Consideration of CCfA therefore needs to be set in this context. The production of good quality management information from which Councillors can work in a problem-solving capacity to understand and solve important issues for the community is crucial to ensure that CCfA does not end up as something used all the time. Not only could this expend a considerable amount of additional energy it also could undermine what services should be doing all the time to put right what is not working.
30. This will enhance the power of CCfA as a last resort if no feasible solution can be found. The Ward Member would be a clear champion for an issue raised directly from their ward, where all established grievance procedures have failed to solve the problem. The link with the LAP Steering Groups is important because it could potentially create a more direct response to local needs. This potential strength would ensure that a proper all-embracing attempt has been made to deal with issues. In turn this would ensure that the CCfA process is used to address those issues which are truly intractable and highlight their significance more strongly. In considering the CCfA model the Working Group highlighted the need to develop appropriate links between LAPs and OSC to avoid duplication and more importantly the really intractable issues are prioritised for problem solving. In that respect it was noted that the ward councillors have a key role in championing these at both OSC and LAPs. The CCfA proposal is attached in Appendix 1.
31. Members and residents understanding and engagement of the CCfA process are crucial in developing the forums for discussion of difficult issues and also creating the environment for finding solutions to those difficult problems. Members noted that there have been on-going discussion through an Officer Group at the Council around the development of the CCfA process and this has been agreed by the Council's Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There has also been discussion held with the Partnership Delivery Groups to seek their comments on the CCfA process. This process was also discussed at a recent LAP Steering Group Members Conference.
32. The Group noted in general partners and local residents welcomed the opportunity to work with community leaders to find solutions to difficult problems. The CCfA workshop Members held at the second meeting also highlighted how there is no easy solutions to difficult problems. Effective community leadership can facilitate discussions between the various stakeholders to minimise impact on individuals and from this perhaps begin to explore different approaches. This is itself not easy and will not provide instantaneous answers. Members therefore felt a key issue would be managing expectations about how CCfA will work and believed it was therefore important to raise awareness amongst Members, local residents and officers at the Council and partner organisations.

Recommendation 1 That the Council develops a programme to raise awareness amongst Members, residents and other stakeholders of the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) process.

33. The Working Group considered a draft Performance Digest report at their second meeting. This contained data from the 1st quarter of 2009/10 disaggregated by theme, locality and equality strands. The idea is that this should allow the identification of trends and key issues to aid the development of solutions and appropriate action.
34. In collecting the data a number of issues have been highlighted which includes changes to both the collection of data and alignment of system to ensure mapping of issues by the same theme. There is on-going work within the Council to address this. Similar concerns exist about the collection of information about FOI requests and petitions.
35. The initial analysis of the available data showed that more than a quarter of all Stage 1 complaints were generated in LAP 1. More than half these complaints concerned housing management and repairs. This was higher than the housing complaints generated in other LAPs. At the same time Members' Enquiries about these issues were fairly evenly distributed across the LAPs. The Working Group agreed that the Performance Digest could be a very useful tool for identifying the really intangible local problems and agreed that this needed to be further developed. Discussion was also held at the LAP Conference in January 2010 around the usefulness of the Performance Digest for LAP Steering Group and there was genuine appetite amongst Steering Group Members for this sort of information to problem solve locally. The Working Group has suggested that the Performance Digest report presented to LAPs should include comments from OSC on areas of concerns and possible solutions which would need to be explored locally.

Recommendation 2 That the Council further develops the Performance Digest report to enable a more comprehensive understanding of residents' concerns at both a borough wide and LAP level.

36. The Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation Paper proposes greater powers for councils to scrutinise local service providers. In its response the Council welcomed this as scrutiny reviews already focused on the overall wellbeing of local people in the area. In considering the role of LAP Steering Groups there is an enormous amount of local leadership which is not being used enough to understand local concerns and find local solutions. In line with the proposals for

CCfA and concerns being raised the Working Group recommends that the Partnership develops local scrutiny with problem-solving focus role for the LAP Steering Groups. This will need to link with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure work is not being duplicated and there is greater accountability at local and strategic level. LAP level scrutiny will also provide Steering Group Members a clear place shaping and service improvement role.

Recommendation 3

That the Partnership develops local scrutiny with a problem-solving focus through LAP Steering Groups and links this in with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

37. The Council has recently agreed a revised Third Sector Strategy which aims to create an environment for a thriving voluntary and community sector. It is estimated that there are over 2,500 active community organisations in the borough who receive around £55m of council funding annually. The Strategy has identified five key areas in which the Council can make a real difference to the Third Sector.
38. The Working Group noted that an important attribute of third sector organisations is that they can reach communities that traditional public sector services providers may not easily be able to access. Furthermore, as local service providers they also have access to a wide range of local information which can support community leaders in their understanding of their area. One of the key themes from the Third Sector Strategy is the development of the voice and representation role of the sector. Councillors as local representatives can play a crucial role in the development of the voice of third sector as they have key roles within the Council as well as external organisations.
39. The policy shift towards ward councillors having a greater place shaping role has been further emphasised in the Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation paper. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Area Assessment also places a greater role on community leaders to provide local leadership in improving services for residents. In light of these developments the Working Group has suggested that further work is needed to support councillors improve their links and work with the third sector and partner organisations if they are truly to understand local needs and ensure services are fully responsive. The development of the Council for Voluntary Sector offers a real opportunity to co-ordinate this piece of work in a more manageable way.

Recommendation 4

That the Council develops a programme to improve Councillors' links with third sector and partner organisations, focusing on enhancing their ward level leadership role.

40. The diversity of councillors in Tower Hamlets strengthens their community leadership role. This is particularly important for developing a cohesive community and increasing the number of residents that feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This is a key indicator in the borough's local Annual Residents Survey.
41. The Working Group welcomed some of the work the Council has already done to improve the diversity of our community leaders. This includes the award winning Women into Public Life programme to attract local women from all backgrounds to get involved in public life. The programme includes a dedicated website providing information and support for local women interested in playing a public role in their community. More recently the Council ran a programme for Future Women Councillors with 17 local women who developed their knowledge and skills to feel confident to stand as a councillor. During the programme many of the participants played an active part in the LAPs and joined scrutiny reviews as co-opted Members.
42. This year the Council has launched the 'Community Leadership Skills Programme' designed to help individuals develop, enhance and grow their community leadership skills. This has been advertised widely and will offer an opportunity to under-represented communities to come forward and be more involved in local democracy. The Tower Hamlets Partnership is also currently looking to develop a Community Leadership programme for Somali residents and discussions have been held with the current Mayor, who is believed to be the first Somali Mayor nationally.
43. The Working Group were keen to ensure that the Council continues developing mechanisms to support community leaders and in particular ensure targeted work is undertaken with under-represented or new communities in the borough. This could include using citizenship ceremonies to identify emerging communities and also to recruit residents into these programmes.

Recommendation 5

That the Council continues to develop programmes to support Community Leaders at all level including targeted work with minority and new communities.

44. Using a team of local government peers the Equality Framework for Local Government assesses local authorities against five key performance areas one of which is around place shaping and leadership. The Council was assessed in January 2010 and was rated 'Excellent'. The team commented that that equality and diversity are intertwined with scrutiny and understood to drive improvements

and efficient spend. This provides a good base to strengthen Members' role in reducing inequalities within the borough. The Working Group noted that there are some informal Member Champion roles that already exist for older people and local heritage.

45. The Working Group recommends this be further developed through Member Champion roles for all the equality strands. This will allow Members to champion specific causes for certain communities. The diversity of the borough and the challenges posed by the outlook of reduced public sector funding highlights the potential importance of these roles. The experience of Member Diversity and Equality Group could be drawn upon and the Member Champions could be selected from this group. The Civic Mayor can also have a central role in championing community cohesion in the borough and provide the profile these issues deserve.

Recommendation 6

That the Council develops Member Champion roles on key areas such as the equalities strands to ensure those areas are promoted at strategic and local level.

46. During the last local elections 32 out of the 51 councillors were elected new to the Council. These new Members had to develop their understanding of the organisation to ensure they are able to fulfil their community leadership role all in a very short space time to meet the high expectations of their local constituents. The Council has been providing an extensive Induction Programme for new councillors over the years. However, local government has changed considerably over the last few years with a greater emphasis on community leaders place shaping their local area. A number of external inspections of local authorities have placed community leadership at the forefront of their assessment, highlighting the importance of supporting the development of community leaders.
47. The Working Group therefore felt it would be useful to develop a comprehensive induction programme for new councillors which should be tested with existing Members. It was suggested a specific training around providing information and guidance would enable Members to better understand how they can support their constituents. Furthermore, Members training sessions should follow an action learning principle to make them interesting and interactive. In supporting new councillors the Working Group argued that providing a 'buddy system' would enable new councillors to understand organisational pressures as well as provide an easier way to navigate the organisation.

Recommendation 7

That the Council develops a comprehensive Induction Programme for new Councillors including allocating Senior Officers to each Councillor to help them navigate around the Council.

RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

48. The work of local councillors is already promoted through East End Life and the Council website extensively. Twice a year East End Life publishes all Councillors contact and surgery details. Last year the paper also ran a programme of 'meet your councillor', which focused on individual councillors providing details of their work as well as some personal information to enable residents to better understand their role. The Council has also developed the 'cotchin' with councillors' programme allowing young people to talk to Councillors about their concerns.
49. During the focus group a number of residents commented that they were not aware of who their local councillors were and what they were doing. At the same time many people also said there had been some really good work by local councillors and sometime people did not hear about this. The Working Group welcomed the use of the East End Life and the Council website but felt that the Council should explore more innovative methods to highlight work of local councillors and how local people can work with them to influence decisions affecting their area. This could include use of social media and developing councillors website pages which provides more information about their work and their policies which can help residents understand how these have helped shape their local area. It was also noted that an effective CCfA process would help raise Members profile.

Recommendation 8

That the Council develops innovative communication mechanisms such as use of social media and developing councillors website to highlight their work including how local residents can work with Councillors to shape their area.

50. The Working Group noted that generally Full Council meetings are very well attended by local residents but this is not the case with most of the other Committees including Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Communities in Control White Paper also encourages councils to improve participation in the local democratic process including proposals for moving meetings outside the Town Hall.

51. The Council has already undertaken some feasibility work around developing a programme of meetings outside the Town Hall. There are associated costs which would need to be considered in the development, but it is hoped that this would be offset by increasing resident engagement in the decision making process. Meetings at external venues would need to be advertised widely through East End Life and the Council website as well as within the vicinity of the venue to ensure maximum attendance by local residents.
52. The Working Group therefore recommends that the Council introduces a programme a formal meetings at different locations within the borough. These should be meetings that local residents are interested in and the process for being involved in these meetings should be publicised to residents. There is also a need to ensure these meetings are co-ordinated with local LAP meetings and they do not clash.

Recommendation 9

That the Council rolls out a programme of formal meetings at different community locations within the borough.

53. Signing a petition is one way for citizens to express their concerns. Some local authorities already have well developed processes for responding to petitions and approach them as an opportunity to listen to the community. The Government is currently undertaking a consultation on the duty to respond to petitions and incorporates proposals from Communities in Control to ensure petitions lead to actions and local authorities have a facility for e-petitions.
54. The number of petitions being received by the Council has been much lower than the previous years. The reasons for this are unclear but could be due to petitions relating to social housing now going to relevant housing partners or they are not being properly recorded as current procedure requires. Improving the management of the petitions the Council would strengthen the effectiveness of the Performance Digest and also enable a better response to the issues raised.

Recommendation 10

That the Council reviews the way petitions are managed and develops a more comprehensive system for receiving and responding to petitions.

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

55. The Tower Hamlets Partnership is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Tower Hamlets. It brings together a wide range of public, private, community and

voluntary organisations to achieve the shared vision for the borough. There are eight Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) which provide a formal framework through which residents are involved with all their key partners. They provide a mechanism for engaging with local people and form an important aspect of local accountability and service improvement.

56. To ensure its effectiveness and improvement the Partnership regularly reviews its performance and its structures. Following a comprehensive review of the governance of the Partnership in 2008 a new structure was introduced. Each LAP is now co-chaired by a ward councillor and a local resident. The resident members are appointed through a formal application process and try to ensure that LAP Members reflect the diversity of their area.
57. All throughout the review both Members and local residents expressed concerns around the new LAP structures and role of the various stakeholders. The key concern is that the Partnership is not fully utilising the resource available through the LAPs and this needed to be maximised if we are going to improve local leadership. There were a number of positives highlighted which included the Participatory Budget process which attracted a huge number of local residents and allowed local residents to be involved in decision making.
58. Officers and Members present at the first meeting agreed that LAP structures were not being fully utilised by Members and the communication between them and LAP Managers needed to improve. This also impacted upon the LAP Steering Group as it lacked Member level engagement. The Working Group therefore recommends that this be reviewed to ensure councillors play a more pro-active role in the LAPs.

Recommendation 11

That the Partnership reviews how the Local Area Partnership (LAP) structures involve Councillors more effectively by utilising their democratic mandate and relationships with their constituents, for example helping to access 'hard to reach' sections of the community and communicating with residents in more open ways. .

59. LAP Steering Group Members and Members that attended the focus group highlighted that LAP agendas did not have sufficient local focus and were too full of consultation and update reports. This did not allow Steering Group Members to raise local issues. There are also issues about limited access to LAP meetings for residents who are not Steering Group Members. The Scrutiny Session last year on Dangerous Dogs was highlighted as an example of an issue that attracted huge number of local residents due to local concern. The Partnership used to arrange these meetings in the past on local issues and it was felt that this needed to be re-

visited. In improving access to LAPs it will help develop local intelligence and better understand the wide range of local priorities.

Recommendation 12

That the Partnership reviews the way work programmes and agendas are being set at LAP Steering Groups to ensure it has a more local focus and encourages other residents to attend.

60. The Participatory Budgeting process allowed both Members and residents to be involved in local decision making. The Working Group discussed whether developing a ward budget for councillors would enable Members as community leaders to identify difficult issues within a ward which requires a small investment to resolve. This could also be used to improve community cohesion through Members organising local meetings or events when any incidents takes place.
61. The Working Group heard that Westminster Council had a Ward Budget scheme that gave each ward £100,000 per year and local councillors were able to agree how this money is spent. This is similar to Tower Hamlets Participatory Budget but with more power given to local councillors. The Working Group were not keen to replace the Participatory Budget but felt the Council should explore whether a smaller grant could be given to each ward of approximately £30k to allocate within their ward.
62. The Working Group held detailed discussion around ensuring there was transparency, accountability and value for money in such a programme. The potential cuts in public finance over the next few years will pose challenges in finding adequate resources to finance this, but at the same time it offers opportunities for local councillors to support important local projects. They have therefore recommended that the Council undertakes a feasibility study of how such a scheme would work and what procedures would need to be put in place to ensure it is successful and transparent.

Recommendation 13

That the Council undertakes a feasibility study to explore allocating ward budgets to local Councillors.

Conclusion

63. This review offered an opportunity to consider how local community leadership could be strengthened to respond to national policy change. The review is very timely considering the upcoming local elections and a new administration. The Council has already undertaken a lot of work to support the development of community leaders and ensuring our leadership reflects our community.
64. There are a number of initiatives in place to allow local residents to take a more active role in their community such as Council Committees, LAP structures and other forums such as Interfaith Forum, the LGBT Community Forum or Pan Disability Panel.
65. The Working Group has made a number of recommendations in three key areas. Firstly, the changing role of community leaders has allowed the Council to consider how it supports local councillors. The proposals developed for Councillor Call for Action offers a real opportunity for councillors and residents to take an active role in problem solving. It also proposes to utilise more effectively the information the Council already has and to use this to understand and address concerns of local residents. The Working Group recognises this will need resources to support Members and residents to understand and develop the process further. Furthermore, this provides an opportunity for Members to facilitate discussions around difficult issues and help manage residents' expectations.
66. There are some very practical issues the Council could do to take democracy to the local community and improve the working relationship between Members and their constituents. The Partnership in Tower Hamlets is very well regarded both locally and nationally. The Working Group has made a number of recommendations to build on this and ensure we utilise the resource available to us.
67. The Working Group hope the recommendations of this review will support the development of local community leaders to enable the borough to become more cohesive where opportunities are equally available for all residents and the aspiration of One Tower Hamlets is realised.

CCfA Model – Appendix 1

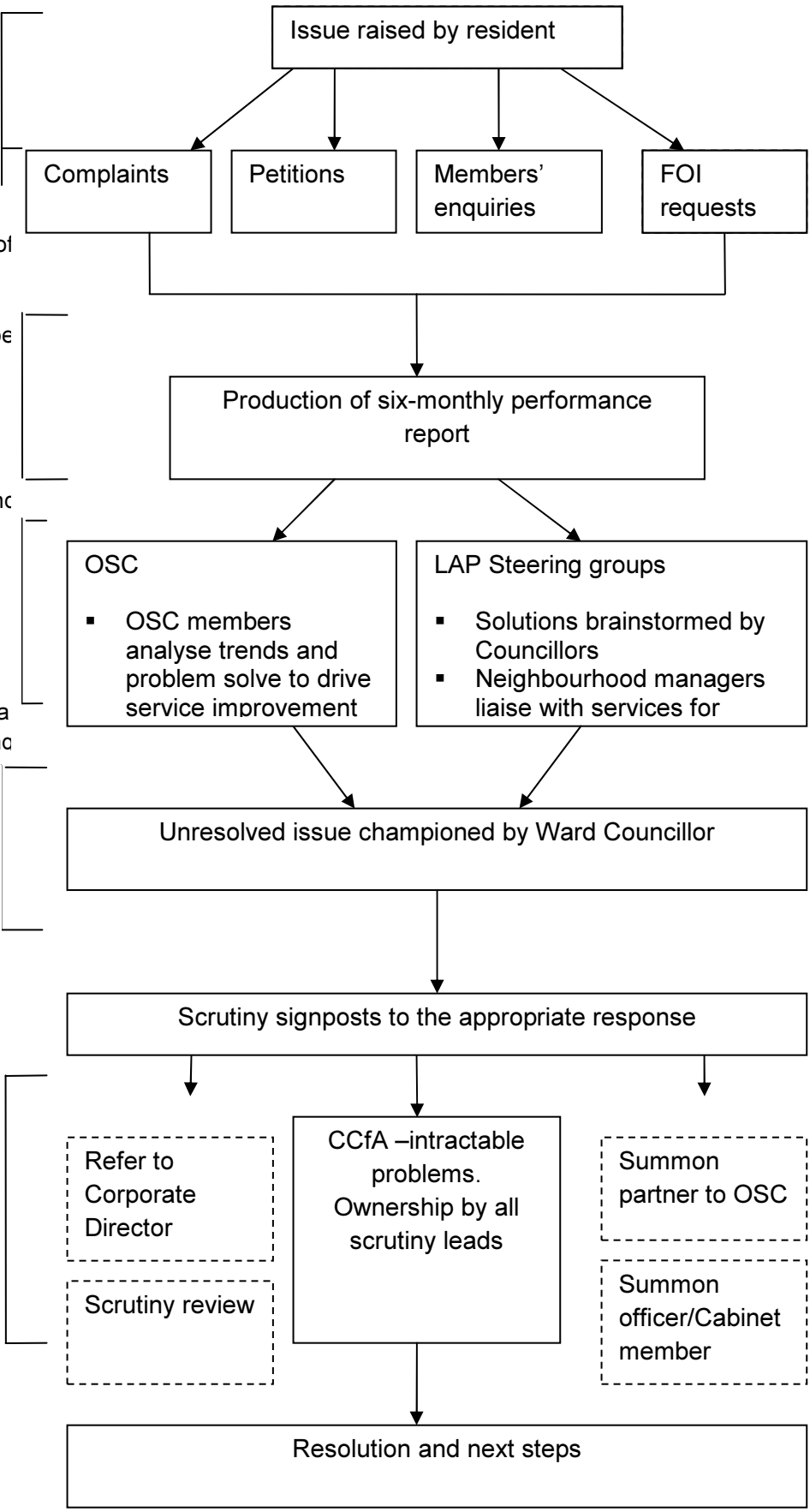
Standard grievance systems – robust, clear processes

Report compiles and makes sense of what these systems are telling us. To be used for corporate management and by

LAP groups and OSC tackle unresolved issues at Borough and ward level, involving Councillors in a problem-solving

At this stage becomes a CCfA – a persistent ward-based problem which has exhausted existing

CCfA goes onto OSC agenda and committee signposts to appropriate response



The Ward Councillor should direct the resident to the appropriate grievance mechanism, and monitor progress. Councillor to refer to checklist at this stage for guidance.

OSC members monitor and evaluate report, working in a problem-solving capacity to spot patterns and find solutions

Councillors attend their relevant LAP group and encourage residents to do so, brainstorm solution to problem at ward level

Scrutiny policy team work with Councillors to go through checklist to ensure issue has been discussed elsewhere. Issue then put onto agenda for OSC.

Councillor works with OSC members to find appropriate response. Cllr informs residents involved of progress and discusses ideas with them

Cllr ensures residents are satisfied with solution and keeps monitoring

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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Agenda Item 9.3

Committee Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date 6th April 2010	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): David Sommerfeld Scrutiny and Equalities Support Officer		Title: <i>Youth Offenders: Supporting Vulnerable Young People</i> Report of the Scrutiny Working Group Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

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

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Agree the report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Service Head for Scrutiny and Equalities to amend the final report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (AS AMENDED) SECTION 100D (AS AMENDED)

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

Background paper

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

None

N/A

3. Background

- 3.1 The Working Group was established in July 2009 to investigate the causes of youth crime, what interventions are already in place to combat youth crime and what further work the Council could do to further reduce youth crime and lower youth crime re-offending rates.
- 3.2 The review had the following objectives. To find feasible solutions to preventing youth crime it wanted to look at:
- The national agenda on youth crime and prevention;
 - Local monitoring and partnership arrangements and respective roles of partners including consideration of local youth crime trends taking into consideration diversity issues;
 - Current preventative initiatives across the partnership;
 - Levels of health, the role of families and the links to youth offending;
 - Reasons why young people might be involved in crime and their views on preventative initiatives;
 - The support given to the most vulnerable young people in problematic and vulnerable families – young people and housing issues six main objectives.
- 3.3 To gather evidence the Working Group visited a Young Offenders Institute and a Youth Court. They also undertook a number of interviews and focus groups with young people being supported by the Youth Offending Team and parents of young offenders. In addition to this a number of evidence gathering sessions with key stakeholders such as the Police, the Youth Justice Board and the Youth Offending Team. The evidence gathered has helped develop and inform the recommendations of this review.
- 3.4 As youth crime is a complex issue the Working Group's recommendations cover a large range of issues. They look at ways of ensuring appropriate resettlement of young offenders on leaving custody, finding ways to re engage young people with the education system, ensuring families of young offenders are given appropriate support to deal with their young people, the provision of activities for young people, improving the communication between different originations, the training offered to officers and the resources for organisations dealing with young offenders. In addition the recommendations promote benchmarking and looking at the transition of young offenders from the youth justice to the adult justice system.
- 3.5 The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix A. Once agreed, the Working Groups report will be submitted to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations.

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

- 4.1. The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall make reports and recommendations

to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for Cabinet to provide a response.

- 4.2. The report contains recommendations which are capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. The report identifies how it relates to the Community Plan, so there is potential for the recommendations to be related to the Council's well-being power in section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. The Council is required by section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to have and to implement strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder, for combating substance misuse and for the reduction of re-offending. Some of the recommendations could be built into these strategies. The Council is required under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to have a youth offending team and to secure the provision of youth justice services in Tower Hamlets. Some of the recommendations may be related to these functions. If Cabinet supported the recommendations, it would be for officers to ensure that any action is carried out lawfully.

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 This report describes the report and recommendations of the Youth Offenders Working Group.
- 5.2 There are no specific financial implications but recommendation R3 proposes investigation of further provision of additional emergency supported housing within Tower Hamlets for young people leaving custody, or appearing before the youth court and in need.
- 5.3 In the event that the Council agrees further action in response to this report's recommendation and other recommendations then officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

6. One Tower Hamlets consideration

- 6.1 As this report deals with youth crime, it focuses on only one section of our residents, that of young people. However as youth crime effects the whole population, it can cause tensions between young people and other groups within the population. Therefore if these recommendations are successful, they will help create a more cohesive population, were people do not fear young people. Furthermore, recommendations 1 – 10 will help to integrate young offenders into wider, law abiding society.
- 6.2 It should also be noted that the evidence gathered by the report shows that in 2008/09 that Asian/Asian British young people committed the biggest proportion of offenses that got a substantive outcome. While Black/Black British young people are over represented in the youth justice system when compared to the proportion Black/Black British make up of Tower Hamlet's population. As the recommendations aim to help all young offenders, these trends are addressed by the recommendation's actions.

7. Risk Management

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

Appendix A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group Report

Youth Offenders: Supporting Vulnerable Young People



**The London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council
March 2010**

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Acknowledgements

The Working Group would like to thank HM Young Offenders' Institution Huntercombe for giving them the opportunity to visit the Institution, the Pupil Referral Unit at the Harpley Centre to allow them to meet parents and the Thames Youth Magistrate Court for allowing them to see a youth court in action and meet court officials. Much of what was learnt at these visits have informed this review. The Working Group also wishes to thank all the young people and parents they interviewed and met in focus groups. Their contribution has influenced many of the recommendations.

Working Group Chair:

Councillor Denise Jones Chair, Scrutiny Lead, Safe and Supportive Communities

Working Group Members

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Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Councillor Rajib Ahmed
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor Phil Briscoe
Councillor Stephanie Eaton

Co – Opted Member

David Chesterton Local Resident, Magistrate, Chair of Advisory group for the Young Offenders Academy Project

Other Councillors involved in the review

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Councillor Dulal Uddin
Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar

London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Officers

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Chair's Forward

Tower Hamlets Community Plan sets a vision to 'improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Tower Hamlets'.

The theme of Safe and Supportive Communities, embedded in 'One Tower Hamlets,' is central to this vision. It is about creating a place where crime is rare and tackled effectively and where communities feel they can live in peace. It recognises that the most disadvantaged people are at risk of becoming perpetrators and victims of crime and calls for strong targeted support and intervention.

The aim of this Review was to gather information from the Youth Justice Board, Youth Offending Team (YOT), the establishments young offenders are involved in (such as the Courts and Young Offending Institutions), and young people and parents to enable us to find out why young people in Tower Hamlets get involved in crime, how effective the national and local prevention schemes are and to see if we could come up with some suggestions that might make improvements.

As this review developed it became clear that youth offending is complex. The Scrutiny Members found that the majority of young people we interviewed had underachieved at school and had opted out of the education system. Many had housing problems and most had difficulty with anger management. We believe that closer communications could be developed between local agencies, to ensure that families, schools, housing and health providers work together on the progress of young offenders.

The Youth Justice Board point out that as the risk factors of youth offending overlap with educational underachievement, young parenthood and adolescent mental health problems, addressing them helps to tackle a number of negative outcomes and not only youth offending. This is why the 17 recommendations we make are so important. These recommendations also cover a wide set of issues, as each new piece of evidence gained, uncovered further issues.

We were impressed with the quality of the work carried out by the YOT, the YJB, the Young Offenders Institutions and the Youth Courts. We were even more impressed by the clear dedication, and care shown by officers for the young people they were working with.

I would like to thank all the young people and their parents who took part in this Review. We see this as a first attempt and would like to suggest the London Criminal Justice Board and Youth Justice Board could encourage other Boroughs to conduct a similar review. I would also like to thank all those listed above for giving their time and for making suggestions to improve the system.

I hope this Review will go some way towards changing systems for the better and that maybe, with effective cross-agency working, Tower Hamlets could one day become a custody free zone.

Cllr Denise Jones
Scrutiny Lead, Safe and Supportive.

Recommendations

Resettlement of young offenders

- R1** That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate sign up to the principles of the London Youth Resettlement Pledge.
- R2** That all young offenders who are at risk of becoming homeless are assessed by a housing officer prior to discharge.
- R3** That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate and the Housing service investigate the provision of additional emergency supported housing within Tower Hamlets for young people leaving custody, or appearing before the youth court and in need.

Re engagement of young people with the Education system

- R4** That the Youth Offending Team maintains up to date data on the number of young people in the Youth Offending Team cohort with special educational needs.
- R5** That, in line with the Rose review, the Children, Schools and Families Directorate support schools so that all teachers are made aware of the difficulties of dyslexia and specialists teachers in each school are trained to recognise the symptoms of dyslexia.
- R6** That Cabinet consider supporting the UK Foyer Federation's proposal to create a Young Offenders Academy in East London.

Family support

- R7** That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate ensure that parenting courses are recommended as a matter of course to parents of young people who are entering the Youth Justice system.
- R8** That the Youth Offending Team develop exit strategies for families of young offenders, linking with targeted youth support and parenting support.

Provision of activities

- R9** That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate use innovative methods of communication to publicise the activities and courses available through Youth Services.
- R10** That the Human Resources Team and Skillsmatch explore increasing the number of work experience placements, specifically targeting ex-offenders (linked with the Worklessness Scrutiny Review).

R11 That the Youth Offending Team discuss with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) the provision of anger management training for young offenders, as appropriate.

Communication

R12 That the Youth Offending Team and Social Care ensure there is good and appropriate communication between them and any Tower Hamlets young person placed in a Young Offenders Institution, Secure Training Centres or Secure Children's Homes, whether on remand or sentence.

Training

R13 That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate ensure that as part of their basic training all social workers and youth workers are given introductory training in local systems for work with young people at risk of offending.

Resources

R14 That Cabinet lobbies Central Government and the Youth Justice Board to ensure Young Offenders Institutions are sufficiently funded to provide a full range of education, mental health and other support services, to facilitate each young offenders transition into responsible, law abiding adulthood.

R15 That in preparation for a period of fiscal tightening the Youth Offending Team identifies and tracks all its current and anticipated funding. Many important programmes have at risk all or part of their funding. This situation requires close monitoring, particularly where partnerships are involved.

Benchmarking

R16 That the Youth Offending Team regularly benchmark against innovative youth offending schemes nationally and where appropriate internationally.

Transition

R17 That the Youth Offending Team ensures young offenders are supported during the transition from the youth justice to the adult justice system, providing full information to Probation services at the point of transfer.

Introduction

1. In 2009/10 the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive Communities, Councillor Denise Jones, identified the challenges of youth offending and its impact on young people's lives, aspirations and the wider community as the focus for a scrutiny review. Youth crime is a concern for residents that continues to be raised with Councillors. Neither the Council, nor the Police, can tackle youth offending alone; it requires a sophisticated partnership approach. In addition to managing youth offending, it is important that there are interventions in place to prevent young people from offending both for their well being and to reduce the cost of addressing the aftermath. Crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime pose risks to the harmony of communities and challenges community cohesion. It is therefore important to have systems in place to help young people resist being involved in crime and to support those who succumb to reduce the risks of re-offending.
2. Tackling youth crime should not just be about enforcement and punishment or prevention and support as required by our regional partners. It should also be about listening to local people and developing local solutions with them. This review has been a useful opportunity to explore the reasons why local young people get involved in crime and what they think preventative measures should look like. In involving both young people and their parents the Working Group have gained a better understanding of a young offender's experience, allowing them to identify ways of improving support and intervention.
3. The aims of the review were to find feasible solutions to preventing youth crime by looking at:
 - The national agenda on youth crime and prevention;
 - Local monitoring and partnership arrangements and respective roles of partners including consideration of local youth crime trends taking into consideration diversity issues;
 - Current preventative initiatives across the partnership;
 - Levels of health, the role of families and the links to youth offending;
 - Reasons why young people might be involved in crime and their views on preventative initiatives;
 - The support given to the most vulnerable young people in problematic and vulnerable families – young people and housing issues
4. To achieve this aim the Working Group agreed the following work programme for the review:

Introductory Meeting (November 2009)

- Agree scoping document
- The National and Local drivers behind youth offending
- Young Offenders Academy Project, a new approach to young offenders in East London

Visits, Interviews and Focus Groups (October 2009 – February 2010)

- Visit to Huntercombe Young Offenders Institute in Oxfordshire
- Interviews with young people on the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP)
- Focus group with young people referred to the Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP)
- Interviews with young people on the Resettlement and Aftercare Programme (RAP)
- Focus group with parents of young offenders
- Focus group with young people on the Triage Programme
- Visit to Thames Youth Court

Second Review Meeting (December 2009)

- The Police's perspective of youth offending
- Tower Hamlets' Youth Offending Team's (YOT) performance
- Trends of learning difficulties amongst young offenders
- The current local preventative measures

Third Review Meeting (January 2010)

- Young offenders and housing
- The London Youth Resettlement Pledge
- Review of evidence and discussion of possible recommendations

5. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the Working Group's report and its recommendations. Following this, Cabinet will develop an action plan to outline how the recommendations will be implemented.

Background

National context

6. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out measures to prevent offending, as part of the youth justice system. The implementation of this aim is undertaken nationally through the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and locally through the Youth Offending Team (YOT). With the recent implementation of the Police & Justice Act 2006 councils now have powers to scrutinise crime and disorder partnerships. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 also grants powers to review and scrutinise Local Area Agreements and the work of partner organisations signed up to targets within them.
7. The YJB for England and Wales is an executive non-departmental public body. Its board members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice. The YJB oversees the youth justice system in England and Wales. It works to prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people under the age of 18, and to ensure that custody for them is safe, secure, and addresses the causes of their offending behaviour.
8. An important part of the youth justice system is the YOT. Every local authority in England and Wales has a YOT and their work will involve working in partnership with the police, probation service, social services, health, education, drugs and alcohol misuse and housing officers. In addressing youth offending, YOTs are responsible for putting in place preventative initiatives. With key partners the YOT is required to produce an annual Youth Justice Plan setting out what youth offending looks like and local preventative measures to address the findings.
9. The Government's Youth Crime Action Plan 2008¹ is a cross-government action plan for tackling youth crime. Recognising that the majority of young people are law abiding citizens, it sets out measures to tackle the issue. Enforcement and punishment where behaviour is unacceptable, non-negotiable support and challenge where it is needed are the foundations of its approach.
10. The London Reducing Re-offending Action Plan sets out the commitment to address the needs of offenders and re-offenders against the backdrop of a growing national prison population. It sets out to improve the co-ordination of services for prisoners on release from custody which is likely to reduce the risks of re-offending. It promotes better information sharing enabling better co-ordination and has the potential to reduce costs and tackle social exclusion issues for the individual. Following on from the consultation on this, the Government has made a commitment to improve the resettlement of young offenders. A key part of this is to forge better links between housing and YOTs. Part of this would be a Youth Re-settlement Pledge, which aims to place children aged 16 and 17 years of age as children in need under the Children

¹ 'Youth Crime Action Plan 2008,' HM Government, July 2008.

Act 1989. The potential negative impact of young people who cannot return to their parental home cannot be under-estimated. Recognising the vulnerability of children placed in bed and breakfast who then re-offend, the Youth Resettlement Pledge sets out to provide suitable accommodation which meets their needs.

11. The YJB's research has classified the risks factors of a young person becoming an offender within four different areas of family, school, community and personal.² The risks factors are shown below:

Risks factors for youth offending			
Family	School	Community	Personal
Poor parental supervision and discipline	Low achievement beginning in primary school	Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood	Hyperactivity and impulsivity
Conflict	Aggressive behaviour (including bullying)	Disorganisation and neglect	Low intelligence and cognitive impairment
History of criminal activity	Lack of commitment (including truancy)	Availability of drugs	Alienation and lack of social commitment
Parental attitudes that condone anti-social and criminal behaviour	School disorganisation	High population turnover, and lack of neighbourhood Attachment	Attitudes that condone offending and drug misuse
Low income			Early involvement in crime and drug misuse
Poor housing			Friendships with peers involved in crime and drug misuse

12. The YJB point out that as the risk factors of youth offending overlap with educational underachievement, young parenthood and adolescent mental health problems, addressing them helps to tackle a number of negative outcomes and not only youth offending.

Local context

13. The Community Plan for Tower Hamlets sets out the vision to 'improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Tower Hamlets'. The theme of Safe and Supportive Communities embedded in 'One Tower Hamlets' is central

² 'Risk and Protective Factors.' Youth Justice Board, 2005.

to this review. It is about creating a place where crime is rare and tackled effectively and where communities feel they can live in peace. It recognises that the most disadvantaged people are highest at risk of becoming perpetrators and victims of crime; it calls for strong targeted support and intervention.

14. Though Resident concerns about crime reduced from 55% in 2007/08 to 47% in 2008/09³, it is still a key priority for residents. Another key concern for residents is anti-social behaviour, although there has been a significant reduction in the percentage of residents seeing anti-social behaviour as a problem from 2007/08 to 2008/09. Over 50% of residents say teenagers hanging around the streets, people using drugs and parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children are key anti-social behaviour related issues of concern for them.
15. According to the Office for National Statistics, the total population of Tower Hamlets was approximately 223,000 in 2005 and was characterised by youth and ethnic diversity. 28% of residents are aged 19 years or younger (National Statistics, 2005) and 76% of the school age population are from a minority ethnic group. GLA (2006) projections for Tower Hamlets demonstrates that the number of young people aged 5 to 19 is likely to increase by 2011. This makes Tower Hamlets a relatively young borough and has implications for service provision. It increases the risk and perceptions of young people being involved in youth offending activities and the management of this jointly with partners and parents is crucial. A growing young population in a borough ranked as the third most deprived could present further challenges in addressing youth offending.

Youth offending in Tower Hamlets

16. The four main offences in the last three years involving 10 to 17 year olds in Tower Hamlets have been violence against the person (204 offenders in 08/09, relating to 20.1% proportion of youth crime committed that year), drugs (153 offenders in 08/09, relating to 15.1% of the proportion of youth crime committed that year), theft and handling (111 offenders in 08/09, relating to 10.9% of the proportion of youth crime committed that year) and public order offences (98 offenders in 08/09, relating to 9.7% of the proportion of youth crime committed that year). There have also been high incidences of motor vehicle crime, robbery and criminal damage related offences. Although the numbers of offences with substantive outcomes, such as reprimand, final warnings or court sentences, have reduced from 1159 in 2006/07 to 1015 in 2008/09, such offences impact negatively on the 10 to 17 years olds who are involved and on the wider community.

³ 'Annual Residents Survey' 2008/09

17. Table 1 shows offences in 2008/09 with a substantive outcome committed by young people broken down by ethnicity.⁴ The percentages in the table express what proportion of the overall number of offences these numbers relate to. Given the diversity of the young population, there appears to be a high percentage of Asian young people who are involved in youth crime.

Table 1

Ethnic Category	Number	%
Asian or Asian British	542	53.4%
White	260	25.6%
Black or Black British	109	10.7%
Mixed	96	9.5%
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	Figures too small for statistical analysis	

18. Table 2 shows the ethnicity of young offenders over a three year period, against ethnicity breakdown of the general population. This shows that Black or Black British youth are over represented in Tower Hamlets' youth justice system compared to the percentage of the population they make up.

Table 2

Offenders Ethnicity	All Years	Population Estimate
Asian or Asian British	56.6%	58.5%
Black or Black British	9.9%	6.2%
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	0.7%	2.3%
Mixed	6.3%	3.8%
Unknown	0.3%	
White	26.2%	29.1%

19. Table 3 shows there appears to be a disproportionate number of young 10 to 17 year old males involved in youth offending during 2008/09 where there has been a substantive outcome.

Table 3

Gender	% of offences committed by group
Male	89.6%
Female	10.4%

⁴ The data highlighted is for 2008/09, any trends identified can change year on year.

Tower Hamlets Youth Justice Plan

20. It is a requirement of all local authorities and their partners to produce a Youth Justice Plan. It sets out local youth offending issues and what preventative measures will be put in place. Its remit is to focus on young people aged 10-17 years at risk of youth offending. The key strategic aims of the Youth Justice Plan are to:

- Prevent offending
- Reduce re-offending
- Ensure the safe and effective use of custody
- Increase victim and public confidence.

21. The priorities in the Youth Justice Plan 2008 were informed by the Youth Justice Service's work which aimed to engage with the families and to expand on their early intervention work. It was recognised that this approach would have some immediate effect but the impact on youth crime would be seen in the long and medium terms.

22. Due to this direction of work the Plan⁵ recognised the need to develop work with First Time Entrants, Custodial Remands and Parenting Support and the need to improve performance on Accommodation. The following preventative and support measures have been put in place:

- Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP)
- Triage
- Out of School Patrols

Current preventative and supportive measures.

23. The YOT already use a number of tools to both prevent youth offending and to support young offenders. A summary of these are given below:

- **A case management role** - For a significant number of the young offenders the YOT works with, the YOT provide a case management role.
- **Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP)** - This provides an alternative to custody. It is designed to meet the needs of the community and the young offender. The offender has to spend 25 hours a week under intensive supervision for the first 3 months. After this they have reduced supervision (minimum of 5 hours a week and weekend supervision) usually for 3 months. During these supervisions, the young people are engaged in activities that look at offending behaviour, interpersonal skills, education, training, employment, family support and restorative justice.

⁵ 'Youth Justice Plan Planning Tool,' 2008/09

- **Challenge and Support Programme (CaSP)** - This programme aims to prevent the escalation of anti social behaviour by children and young people by using a 'triple track' approach to tackle anti social behaviour and youth crime. The first track is 'tough enforcement,' where measures like Anti Social Behaviour Orders are used to stop escalation of anti social behaviour. The second track is 'non-negotiable support,' where support is given in conjunction with the tough enforcement. The final track is 'early effective intervention,' where it is ensured young people have access to support, such as the YISP, that could help them break down the barriers they face.
- **Resettlement and aftercare programme (RAP)** - This provides support to vulnerable children and young people leaving custody by supporting the young person with employment and housing issues. Their aim is to help young people escape the re-offending cycle.
- **Triage Programme** - This programme includes the expertise of the YOT in the Police's decision making process for low gravity, first time offences committed by 10 -17 year olds. Young people on the programme participate in activities of restorative intervention and, crime and consequences sessions. Support is also offered to the Parent or Carer of the young person.
- **Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP)** - 8 – 13 year olds who are seen as being at risk of committing crimes (they may not have committed a crime) are referred to the panel by social workers, teachers and sometimes parents. Once referred to the panel, the panel will try and find ways to help the young person and their family, aiming to help them access mainstream services.

Tower Hamlets' YOT's performance

24. It should be recognised that the YOT in Tower Hamlets is successful in the work it does. This is clearly seen by its performance figures as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Indicator	Result by percentage	Result by number	London Average
NI 19 Rate of proven re-offending by young offenders	0.39% (Jan 09 – March 09)	63 re-offences in a cohort of 162 during the period Jan – March 2009	0.28% (Jan 09 – March 09)
NI 111 First time entrants to the Youth Justice System aged 10 – 17	14.4% reduction when comparing the six month period of April 09 – Sep 09 with April 08 – Sep 08	113 (April 09 – Sep 09) 132 (April 08 – Sep 08)	14.5% reduction
NI 43 Young people within the	6.1% (April 09 – Sep 09)	264 sentences, 16 of these were	7.5% (April 09 – Sep 09)

Youth Justice System receiving a conviction in court who are sentenced to custody		custodial (April 09 – Sep 09)	
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<p>NI 45 Young offenders' engagement in suitable education, training and employment (ETE)</p>	<p>82.2% (April 09 – Sep 09)</p>	<p>67 young people aged 16 and over are supervised by the YOT</p> <p>58 young people aged 16 and over in suitable education, training and employment (ETE)</p> <p>85 young people aged below 16 supervised by the YOT</p> <p>69 young people aged below 16 in ETE.</p>	<p>75.7% (April 09 – Sep 09)</p>
<p>NI 46 Young Offenders' access to suitable accommodation</p>	<p>97.2% (April 09 – Sep 09)</p>		<p>96.2% (April 09 – Sep 09)</p>

25. The Working Group heard from officers at the YJB that Tower Hamlets tends to out perform their statistical neighbours. In particular the performance around resettlement has meant the YJB have often sign posted other YOTs to Tower Hamlet's integrated resettlement service as good practice. The Working Group also found that the Council is on track to meet its Local Area Agreement indicator of NI 19 (Rate of re-offending by young offenders). Though this shows the YOT work in Tower Hamlets to be effective, this does not mean there is not space for improvement.

Findings

Resettlement of young offenders

26. The Government Office for London (GOL), the YJB and Young London Matters claim that nationally, approximately 70% of young offenders will re-offend within 12 months of being released from custody.⁶ In Tower Hamlets the average number of re-offences per young person in the youth offenders cohort, between January and March 2009 was 0.39 (out of a cohort of 162 there were 63 re-offences). The risk of re-offending increases if support, such as appropriate accommodation, is not given to the young offender when leaving custody.
27. These findings were borne out by information gained by Members from the interviews and the visit to the Huntercombe Young Offenders Institution. In interviews with young people from Tower Hamlets on the Resettlement and Aftercare Programme (RAP), they told stories of being resettled in hostels which also housed drug dealers and prostitutes, were dirty and there was no one of their own age. One young person told how the hostel she had been placed in was not near her school, resulting in her staying away from school. All of these factors were not conducive to stopping the young person re-offending. It was not until there was further intervention by a support officer from the RAP that the young person's risk of re-offending seemed to be reduced. When speaking to officers at the Young Offenders Institution, Members were told that one of the challenges faced was resettlement of the young people after leaving the Institution.
28. The Working Group noted that Tower Hamlets is already doing a lot to deal with this issue of resettlement. The Head of Homelessness and Housing Advice Services informed the Working Group that the Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 had changed the originally limited response to resettling homeless young offenders. They now have a Housing Options Support Team (HOST), which includes a Criminal Justice Worker and a dedicated Young Persons Worker. They are now moving to the cessation of using Bed and Breakfast accommodation by mid 2010. They have also increased the use of 'supportive' accommodation such as Drapers City Foyer, Kipper: Jeremiah House and Whites Row. All of this is designed so a homeless young offender referred to the Homeless Team is both resettled and given adequate support.
29. The London Youth Resettlement pledge was GOL's, YJB's and Young London Matters response to the issues of resettlement of young offenders leaving custody. The pledge identified 10 key services that a young person should get on leaving custody (see Appendix 1). From the Working Group's consideration of the London Youth Resettlement pledge, it became apparent that the Children Schools and Families Directorate are in the process of doing or already do the majority of the Pledge's requirements. Though the majority of the services mentioned by the pledge are being done, Members felt that to ensure this work

⁶ 'London Youth Resettlement Pledge,' GOL, YJB and Young London Matters, 2008. Page 2.

continues and we meet all areas of the pledge the Council should sign up to the principles of the Youth Resettlement Pledge.

R1 That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate sign up to the principles of the London Youth Resettlement Pledge.

30. One of the key services mentioned in the London Youth Resettlement Pledge is the need to ensure that homeless young offenders are assessed for housing before they leave custody. This service is important, as if done fully it will reduce the chances of a young person leaving custody homeless and should reduce their likelihood of re-offending. The Working Group felt this service should be strengthened and so recommends that young offenders at risk of being homeless are assessed before they are discharged.

R2 That all young offenders who are at risk of becoming homeless are assessed by a housing officer prior to discharge.

31. Though there is a lot of work happening around resettlement, it was recognised by Members that there was space for improvement. One area that needs improvement is that there is not enough emergency supported housing for young people. This was particularly a problem when young people were suddenly released from a Young Offenders Institute. Informed by the findings that the risk of re-offending is increased if a young person is not given support on leaving custody, the Working Group felt this lack of emergency supported housing was a particular risk to seeing an increase in re-offending. Therefore the Working Group recommends that the Children, Schools and Families directorate and Housing service explore the provision of additional emergency supported housing for young people from Tower Hamlets who are leaving custody.

R3 That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate and the Housing service investigate the provision of additional emergency supported housing within Tower Hamlets for young people leaving custody, or appearing before the youth court and in need.

Re engagement of young people with the Education system

32. The Working Group learnt that many young people in custody had literacy and learning difficulties. According to the YJB, in 2003, 90% of the young people in custody in the United Kingdom had difficulty in writing. In Tower Hamlets, 210 of the young people who were part of the YOT during 2003 – 2005 were screened for reading recognition and comprehension. This related to about 40% of the young people who had been on the YOT during that period. Out of this group, 32% were referred to a Dyslexic assessment. It became clear to the Members, from this information, that young people in custody or on the YOT often have learning difficulties. However, this data was old and therefore was unable to give an up to date picture about the learning difficulties faced by young people on the YOT. Without up-to-date data it is difficult to assess the appropriate actions that need to be taken. For these reasons, the Review recommends that up to date

data on the special education needs of the young people in the YOT should be available for all partners working with young offenders.

R4 That the Youth Offending Team maintains up to date data on the number of young people in the Youth Offending Team cohort with special educational needs.

33. Though this data is out of date, the Working Group noted that learning difficulties can lead to frustration and low self esteem, which in turn can lead to depression and violence, though this does not mean that because a young person has learning difficulties they will automatically commit a crime. The point is that a lot of young offenders suffer from these problems and need help.
34. The Working Group noted that for some young people, problems with reading and writing made it difficult to engage with the education system. This lack of engagement was seen in the interviews undertaken by Members, where the young people often described school as 'boring.' This boredom seemed to arise from a lack of interest in the subject matter covered, some even suggested it was, 'too easy.' This seems to result in many of the young people the Members met having a laissez-faire attitude towards education and school. However, it was also clear that this could lead to frustration, which in turn could lead to depression and violence. A lack of engagement in the education system often leads to staying away from school and a higher likelihood of getting in trouble with authorities. If we assume that this lack of engagement also leads to a low attainment in literacy and numeracy (due to not being at school), Stephenson (Cited in the Department for Education and Skills report 'Rising Standards')⁷ shows that this has a greater effect on the young person as they get older. Having low attainment leads to a failure to achieve qualifications, this leads to decreased employability which leads to an increased risk of offending. Therefore, to stop youth offending, even when they are older, it is important that this disengagement with the education system is addressed.
35. One way of addressing this disengagement is through dealing with the learning difficulties. Though dyslexia is only one of the learning difficulties, the Rose Report, which looked into dyslexia for the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, made a recommendation to ensure teachers are supported to recognise the difficulties of dyslexia and schools have specialist teachers who are trained to identify the symptoms of dyslexia at an early age. Rose points out that success in spotting learning difficulties and dealing with them is achieved if the teachers know what they are doing and why they are doing it.⁸ It is likely that if teachers are taught to recognise the difficulties of dyslexia they may also see the signs of other learning difficulties which they would not be able to diagnose but could refer to specialists.

⁷ Stephenson cited in 'Raising Standards, A Contextual Guide to Support Success in Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Provision.' Department for Education and Skills, 2007

⁸ 'Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties. An independent report from Sir Jim Rose to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families' June 2009. Pages 15 -16.

R5 That, in line with the Rose review, the Children, Schools and Families Directorate support schools so that all teachers are made aware of the difficulties of dyslexia and specialist teachers in each school are trained to recognise the symptoms of dyslexia.

36. The belief that we need to find ways to re-engage young offenders with the education system is also one of the motivations behind the UK Foyer Federation's proposal to develop a Young Offenders Academy in East London. The Chair of the advisory group for the Young Offenders Academy Project explained to Members that currently the State is required to provide education to young people in custody, however due to lack of resources the education provided is not always of great quality or for long periods of time. What is more, by going into custody, the education and any other support the young person was receiving, is disrupted. This disruption makes it more difficult to fully educate or support the young person. The proposed Young Offenders Academy has been designed to combat this in a cost effective way.
37. The Young Offenders Academy would be a campus model. It would consist of three units. The first would be a secure unit that accommodated 75 young people, the second would be a residential unit that supported 75 young people and the third would be a service hub. Importantly the Academy would be situated somewhere within East London, no further than one hour's transport ride from where the young person lives. The service hub would have organisations based there like the YJB, so outreach work could be done.
38. The importance of the location and having support organisations based on the hub is that it will stop the disruption caused by being sent to Young Offenders Institutions that are often miles away from home. In Lord Woolf's inquiry⁹ into the prison disturbances of the 1990's, it was found that a way to help the running of a prison and reduce the risk of re-offending was to ensure the prisoner was situated in a prison that was near enough to home that they could keep their links with their community and family. While youth offenders establishments run by Fundacion Diagrama in Spain, have found that having a local catchment area means that close communications are developed with local agencies, ensuring everyone, from families and schools to accommodation and health providers are continually involved in the progress of young offenders. Therefore the location also allows the young person's previous provision of education or social work to not be disrupted.
39. The advantage of having the three different units means that the Academy can concentrate not only on lowering the risk of re-offending among those in custody but also intervene, through the other two units, with those who have not entered custody and help lower the risk of them becoming offenders. Furthermore, according to the Foyer Federation's calculations this type of academy would cost less than the amount currently spent on keeping young people in custody. It is

⁹ Woolf cited in 'Youth Offenders in East London.' East Potential, 2008.

proposed that the Council should look at the possibility of supporting a pilot of the Young Offenders Academy in East London.

R6 That Cabinet consider supporting the UK Foyer Federation's proposal to create a Young Offenders Academy in East London.

Family support

40. Through interviews with the young people and the review meetings, it became clear to Members that youth offending has many complex reasons behind why it happens and affects more than just the young offender and their victim. A group that youth offending affects in a big way is the family of the offender. The Working Group recognised that the family needed as much support as the offender. An interview with the parent of a young offender showed how they felt at a loss to know what they could do to prevent their child from re-offending.
41. It also became apparent to the Working Group that the Family has an important role in reducing the risk of a young person offending. It was particularly noticeable to Members that many of the young people they saw in their short visit to the Thames Youth Court, had a home life that was not very stable. Some of the young people seen at the Court were in foster care and others had parents who were very ill. While the majority of the young people seemed to have a problem with anger.
42. On speaking to the Legal Team Manager at the Thames Youth Court, the Working Group were told that it was felt that parenting orders were not being used effectively. As any form of support for the Family gives them the tools and ability to support the young offender not to re-offend, parenting orders are a useful tool. Therefore, the Working group recommends they are readily available to parents of young people entering the justice system and that the Youth Court could consider summoning absent parents to court to impose a parenting order.

R7 That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate ensure that parenting courses are recommended as a matter of course to parents of young people who are entering the Youth Justice system.

43. When the Working Group interviewed a parent, she said she had found the support provided by the YOT, Pupil Referral Unit and Police was brilliant at first. However, it was later, when the young person was still getting into trouble and the parent had tried everything to solve the problem, she felt the family lacked the support they needed. They no longer knew who they could turn to for help.
44. The Working Group recognised that the YOT cannot provide support to parents indefinitely. However it was felt that exit strategies developed for the families, which could signpost families to other support, would ensure families could still receive the support they needed.

R8 That the Youth Offending Team develop exit strategies for families of young offenders, linking with targeted youth support and parenting support.

Provision of activities

45. When the Members spoke to the focus group of young people on the Triage programme and when they met young offenders from Tower Hamlets at the Huntercombe Young Offenders Institution, the young people complained that one of the reasons they got into crime was because they were bored as there was nothing for them to do in their areas, with things like youth clubs open at the wrong times. When challenged over this statement, it became apparent that the young people did not actually know what was available for them in the Borough or what time youth clubs were open. When Council Officers were questioned about this at the review meetings, they pointed out that youth clubs are widely publicised in the local areas through East End Life and the Tower Hamlets' youth website 'amp.' (<http://www.amp.uk.net/>). Though this is the case, it was clear that the young people still did not know what options they had available. As young people are more likely to use new technologies to find out about what is happening, it is recommended that it be investigated how such technologies could be used to ensure young people both knew about activities available and got involved in them.

R9 That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate use innovative methods of communication to publicise the activities and courses available through Youth Services.

46. When speaking with young people, the Members found that some wanted to go on training courses which could help them get a job. This was particularly the case for the young people on the ISSP and Triage programmes that the Members interviewed. Looking again at Stephenson's¹⁰ model, this would have a positive effect on the young person's future, as it would make them more employable and therefore less likely to re-offend. It is suggested that to address this issue the recommendation from the Scrutiny Review on Reducing Worklessness (2009/10), that looks at increasing the number of work experience placements for ex-offenders is included in the recommendations for this review.

R10 That the Human Resources Team and Skillsmatch explore increasing the number of work experience placements, specifically targeting ex-offenders (linked with the Worklessness Scrutiny Review).

47. It became clear to the Working Group that many of the young people they spoke to had anger management difficulties. It seemed that many had got into trouble as they believed the way to solve their problems was through violence. The Working Group understood that problems around aggression was a common factor of young offenders in the system. This alludes to the findings of the YJB

¹⁰ Stephenson cited in 'Raising Standards, A Contextual Guide to Support Success in Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Provision.' Department for Education and Skills, 2007

that found out of 301 young offenders, 31% had mental health needs.¹¹ It was recommended by the young people on the ISSP programme that a way to deal with this challenge would be to offer anger management training to young offenders on the YOT, where appropriate. The Members agreed that such a provision is essential to lower the risk of offending.

R11 That the Youth Offending Team discuss with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) the provision of anger management training for young offenders, as appropriate.

Communication

48. As identified by the UK Foyer Federation, when a young person enters custody often their support services and education are disrupted. This can happen because the young person can be sent to a Young Offenders Institution miles away from where they live (Feltham, in Surrey, is the nearest Institution to Tower Hamlets). On the visit to the Huntercombe Young Offenders Institution the Working Group also heard of this lack of continuity between the support services and found another cause of it was a lack of communication between the Institution, the YOT and Social Care services.

49. If this disruption is addressed the young person would continue to get the support they need to lower their risk of re-offending. Therefore the Members recommend that communication between YOT, Social Care and the places like Youth Offending Institutes is both good and regular.

R12 That the Youth Offending Team and Social Care ensure there is good and appropriate communication between them and any Tower Hamlets young person placed in a Young Offenders Institution, Secure Training Centres or Secure Children's Homes, whether on remand or sentence.

Training

50. The Working Group agreed that one of the best ways to stop a young person getting into crime was through early intervention. Programmes like the YISP, which work with young people who have been identified as being at risk of offending but are not convicted, allow this to happen. However, for such programmes to work they rely on professionals being able to identify the young people who would come under this category. Such identification could happen through clear assessments by social workers who had been trained to recognise the symptoms. Additionally, if youth workers undergo training they could identify some of the young people they work with.

51. In the first review meeting Members were told about the current development of the Youth Crime Action Plan which introduces a scaled approach to intervening with young people who are at risk at offending. It was recognised that such an

¹¹ 'Mental Health, Source Document.' Youth Justice Board, 2008.

approach was designed to help those who were more likely to offend. This in turn meant that resources were being taken away from those at the lower end of the scale, young people who were just getting into criminal activities. Again, training of professionals such as social workers and youth workers would ensure those young people on the lower end of the scale were picked up, through tools such as assessments, and referred to appropriate help.

52. The Working Group recognised that the YOT deals with young people who could be classed as being at the higher end of the scale regarding their likelihood to offend or re-offend. Those at the lower end were likely to be dealt with by professions such as youth workers or social workers. To ensure that these young people did not become a higher risk, it is essential that these professionals are trained to identify young people at risk of offending and signpost them to the local systems for working with such young people.

R13 That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate ensure that as part of their basic training all social workers and youth workers are given introductory training in local systems for work with young people at risk of offending.

Resources

53. At Huntercombe Young Offenders Institution the Working Group discovered that there had been a cut in education provision for the young people in custody from 18 hours to 15 hours a week. They also got 10 hours of prison activities a week. This meant that when the prison was at full capacity, it was unable to ensure all young offenders got appropriate activities all day, every day. This can result in the young people spending long periods of time sitting in their cells watching TV. In the long term this also means the young people are not given the opportunity to learn the skills that could prevent them from re-offending in the future.

54. It was suggested that the key issue was the lack of funding for the Institute to allow them to provide appropriate activities and education. Therefore the Working Group recommends that while other options, such as the Young Offenders Academy are being developed, the Council takes a proactive role in lobbying Central Government to ensure Young Offending Institutions have adequate funds to provide education and training for young offenders.

R14 That Cabinet lobbies Central Government and the Youth Justice Board to ensure Young Offenders Institutions are sufficiently funded to provide a full range of education, mental health and other support services, to facilitate each young offenders transition into responsible, law abiding adulthood.

55. In a presentation to Members on Tower Hamlets' performance around youth offending, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) identified that a challenge that would be faced by Tower Hamlets' YOT was the likely financial limitations they would encounter due to the current recession and future cuts in public sector spending. The Working Group, later found that successful programmes such as the YISP did not have secure long term funding, as they were being funded through pots of money such as Participatory Budgeting.

56. Therefore, in light of the current economic situation, the Members feel that programmes at risk of losing funding should be identified as being at risk and closely monitored.

R15 That in preparation for a period of fiscal tightening the Youth Offending Team identifies and tracks all its current and anticipated funding. Many important programmes have at risk all or part of their funding. This situation requires close monitoring, particularly where partnerships are involved.

Benchmarking

57. In researching for this review the Working Group have not only seen innovative practices by Tower Hamlet's YOT but have come across other progressive practices around dealing with youth offending elsewhere in the country and abroad. One example is the young offenders establishments managed by Fundacion Diagrama in Spain.¹² At these establishments, the primary function of each member of staff is to facilitate a young offender's transition into a law abiding individual within society. Their local catchment areas and funding allow them to build a close working relationship with all parties involved in a young offender's life. The Spanish legal system sees the duration of custodial sentence for a young person as an opportunity for that young person to pass an education or training course. This idea is so prevalent that the sentences often relate to an education cycle. At the same time, Judges will regularly visit custodial establishments and are in frequent communication to review the progress of offenders.

58. The Working Group suggests that Tower Hamlet's YOT can continue to improve its work by investigating such innovative schemes as described above and so recommends that benchmarking against innovative schemes is carried out on a regular bases by the YOT.

R16 That the Youth Offending Team regularly benchmark against innovative youth offending schemes nationally and where appropriate internationally.

Transition

59. This Scrutiny review has dealt with many different issues. However, some of the issues that the research identified could not be dealt with fully by this review. One such issue was the difficulty faced by those transitioning from the youth justice system to the adult justice system. Within the youth justice system a person is given a lot of targeted support. This changes when a young person becomes an adult, making the transition challenging. It is suggested by the Working Group that a piece of work should be carried out to investigate this issue. However, at the same time, to help this transition, the

¹² 'Notes of a brief visit to young offenders establishments managed by Fundacion Diagrama in Spain. 2, 3, 4, February 2010.' Unpublished notes. Copies available from the Scrutiny and Equalities Team.

Working Group recommend that the YOT work with Probation at the point of transfer, to ensure Probation have all the information they require to support the offender.

R17 That the Youth Offending Team ensures young offenders are supported during the transition from the youth justice to the adult justice system, providing full information to Probation services at the point of transfer.

Conclusions

60. The Working Group welcomed the opportunity to look in depth at the issues of youth offending. The review aimed to find feasible solutions to preventing youth crime. To do this, they looked at what intervention measures are already in place, the support given to the vulnerable children and families and why young people get involved in crime.
61. The Working Group found that youth crime is a complex issue. There is no one reason for why a young person may get into crime, instead there are many reasons, some obvious and some not. This is seen in the Youth Justice Board's (YJB) findings that shows the many risk factors for a young person getting into crime could be grouped into four categories of family, school, community and personal. Within these categories the risk factors stretch from poor housing to alienation. The Working Group's research showed that areas of particular importance for Tower Hamlets were resettlement of young offenders, re engagement of young people with the Education system, support provided to Families of young offenders and the provision of activities for young people. The Working Group also found that to combat youth crime communication between organisations needed to be improved, training for officers outside of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) should be offered, questions over resources needed to be taken into account, continual benchmarking of best practice needed to happen and support needed to be provided to offenders transitioning from the youth justice to the adult justice systems.
62. The Working Group's recommendations have suggested include looking at how to re-engage young people with the education system and ensuring emergency accommodation is available for young people coming out of custody. If engaged with education, the young person is less likely to offend and more likely to move away from crime. This includes being more employable later on in life. It was also noted that by ensuring that there is adequate support systems for young people they are less likely to re-offend.
63. The Working Group also found that the YOT is a high performing team that provide an essential service. They work extremely well with other partners, such as schools, Police and the YJB. This partnership working has helped achieve impressive successes with youth crime in the borough. Finally, in interviews with young people the Working Group continued to come across stories where the YOT's intervention had helped young people reduce the risk of them offending or re-offending.

Appendix 1

The London Youth Resettlement Pledge (The 10 Key Services)

Directors of Childrens Services with local authority partners:

1. Local authority childrens services to carry out CIN assessments under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989 on all children and young people released from custody where the YOT or secure establishment identifies that they may be a child in need¹³

For those young people who reach the threshold for services following a CIN assessment, the necessary resettlement and support services should be provided to address assessed levels of need.

2. Where a young person is already looked after by the local authority, the allocated social worker should continue to discharge their statutory responsibilities throughout the period in custody and on release, including co-ordinating LAC reviews and subsequent care planning.
3. Young people of school age to have a 'back to school' interview with a representative from childrens services prior to release, or at the latest within 2 days of release, with an offer of a school place/education placement made within 5 working days of release.
4. All NEET young people to have an agreed education and training plan prior to release and meet with a Connexions PA or equivalent within 5 working days of release from custody
5. Where a parent / carer is not able to meet a young person on release, a key worker(s) should meet them at the secure establishment in order to accompany them home. In the case of young people who are looked after, the allocated social worker should meet them.
6. All parents/carers of young people in custody to be given access to parenting/ family support prior to release from custody, and for a period after release
7. All young people leaving custody to have prompt access to positive activities on release from custody¹⁴
8. Joint accommodation assessments between the YOT and Local Authority Homeless Persons Unit will be undertaken for all homeless 16/17/18 year olds

¹³ See Howard League judicial review judgement on Manchester City Council re. Local Authorities duties to young people in custody (November 2006)

¹⁴ Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Section 6)

prior to release from custody for advice on housing options and where appropriate, provision of accommodation and support

And in partnership:

9. Registration with GP and access to sexual health advice within 5 working days
10. All young people with an identified alcohol and substance misuse problem to have an agreed careplan prior to release, and meet with their YOT drugs worker / community drugs worker either immediately on release, or within no more than 5 working days, depending on levels of risk and need.

All young people with significant mental health problems and those who are subject to the CAMHS CPA (Care Programme Approach) to be seen by the YOT health worker immediately on release, or within no more than 2 working days, depending on levels of risk and need.

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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Committee Overview and Scrutiny	Date 6 th April 2010	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive		Title: Scrutiny Challenge Session - Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools		
Originating Officer(s): Afazul Hoque Scrutiny Policy Manager		Ward(s) affected: All		

Agenda Item 9.4

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools held in January 2010.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and agree the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session.

Background papers

N/A

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

Afazul Hoque Ext 4636

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 SECTION 100D (AS AMENDED))
LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

3. Introduction

- 3.1 Bullying can be defined as a physical, psychological or verbal attack against an individual or a group of individuals by a person or group of persons, causing physical or psychological harm to the victim. It is usually conscious and wilful and commonly consists of repeated acts of aggression and/or manipulation. It can take a number of forms – both physical and non physical, either in combination or in isolation. Any bullying, whether physical or non-physical may result in lasting psychological damage to the individual.
- 3.2 The damaging results of bullying are of concern to everyone who works with children and young people in Tower Hamlets. The stress for victims of bullying can have far reaching effects on their personal and social development. It can also impact on the educational achievement of them and their peers. The Institute of Education¹ reports that 46 percent of school non-attendance is related to bullying. It also has an impact upon children and young peoples lives throughout the UK and in the most extreme cases it leads to suicide and some groups are especially vulnerable. Around 90 percent of people with a learning disability experience bullying, 66 percent on a regular basis and nearly three quarters report being bullied in a public place, one quarter of them on buses².
- 3.3 The Children Act 2004 requires Children’s Services Authorities to make arrangements ‘to promote co-operation between the authority, its partners and others with a view to improving the well-being of children in their area. This includes the children’s physical and mental health and emotional well-being, protection from harm and educational and social wellbeing’. While schools must set their own policies appropriate to their particular situations and intakes, it is important that the Local Authority sets a standard and offers a framework for schools to use.
- 3.4 The institutions which deal most effectively with bullying are those which acknowledge it as a real or potential problem. They have policies in place which are known to staff, children, parents and carers. They have a range of strategies to establish a strong anti-bullying ethos and offer support, and, where appropriate, clearly understood sanctions to people who have been bullied and people who have displayed bullying behaviour³.

4. Purpose

- 4.1 Challenge sessions are designed as a quick way for a group of members to get to grips with key policy issues and provide a robust check on local policies and services. The purpose of this scrutiny challenge session was to:
- To increase understanding of international, local and school approaches to anti-bullying work.
 - To improve members’ involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.
 - To make recommendations for the further development of an anti-bullying strategy.

¹ www.ioe.ac.uk

² MENCAP 2004

³ Tower Hamlets Anti-Bullying Resource Pack

4.2 Members received presentations and written submissions during the course of the session, as outlined below:

- Anti-bullying – national perspective (The Anti-Bullying Alliance)
- Homophobic bullying – national perspective (Stonewall)
- Step Out DVD – Step Forward
- Tower Hamlets school initiatives for anti-bullying
- Tower Hamlets anti-bullying initiative
- Pupils and parents views on anti-bullying in Tower Hamlets

5. Background

5.1 The borough's *Report of the Commission into the Public Safety of Young People* (2009) wrote that dealing with bullying was a key factor in order to deal with youth violence and the commissioners considered the borough's anti-bullying initiatives to be central in the whole safety strategy.

5.2 The Council provides extensive anti-bullying support for schools, children and parents. For example, the council:

- provided schools with the *Tower Hamlets Anti-Bullying Resource Pack* that offers advice on how to respond to bullying.
- provides universal and targeted training and/or brokers training to all schools to develop and enhance staff skills in preventing incidents of bullying and responding to bullying when it occurs.
- gives guidance to schools on how they can begin to assess the scale of the problem. To support this, the council offers them the use of a free electronic survey which provides children with an anonymous means of making their views known.
- is affiliated to Stonewall's Education Champions programme to tackle homophobia.
- organised the Anti-bullying week in November 2009, including a film competition.
- launched a pilot anti-bullying helpline run by Step Forward in 2009.
- developed the Anti-bullying policy with a multi-agency working party with support from the regional officer of the Anti-Bullying Alliance and a wide consultation.

5.3 There are 69 primary schools and 15 secondary schools in Tower Hamlets. Primary and secondary schools in the borough have vigorously developed anti-bullying policies. In the summer term of 2009, 29 primary schools have met the school anti-bullying prompt (an increase of 6 since the previous term); 24 primary schools are committed to making adjustment to meet the prompt. 10 secondary schools have met the prompt (increase of 4); 5 secondary schools are not yet fully meeting the prompt.

5.4 The borough's anti-bullying initiatives are highly acclaimed by the stakeholders. The 2009 National Audit Commission survey with Head teachers shows that Tower Hamlets Head Teachers perceive the borough's support for combating bullying is

'between good and excellent' (3.03; 1-4 points), which exceeds the participating councils' average (2.69) and places the borough in the top 25%.

- 5.5 The National Strategy Advisor agreed that the borough's anti-bullying practice falls within 'Enhancing' – the highest of four levels of competence– in the National Strategies self-review framework in 2009. It states, 'The planned approach developed by the local authority has had a clear impact on reducing incidents of bullying over a sustained period of time'.
- 5.6 In 2008, Tellus3, a survey of children and young people across England by Ofsted, asked 1,274 pupils (Years 6, 8 and 10) in 30 Tower Hamlets schools the following two questions about bullying:
- 1) How often, if at all, have you been bullied at school?
 - 2) How well does your school deal with bullying?
- 5.7 To the first question, 62% responded 'Never' (56% national); however, 21% responded 'Once or more in the last year' (25% national) and 6% 'Most days' (6% national). While 38% of pupils perceived that their schools deal with bullying 'very well' or 'quite well' (35% national), 28% 'Not very well' (28% national) and 15% 'Badly' (16% national).

6. National Drivers

- 6.1 Anita Compton from the Anti-Bullying Alliance⁴ explained to the meeting that the Alliance brings together 60 organisations into one network with the aim of developing consensus around how to stop and prevent bullying. It aims to influence policy and develop and disseminate best practice. She stated that Tower Hamlets had done some excellent work around reducing bullying and Officers from the borough were fully involved in the Alliance. To deal with bullying effectively it needs to be everyone's business within the childrens services environment, as it has far reaching effect on young peoples personal and social development.
- 6.2 The meeting was informed that a key priority of the Alliance was to work with parents Guidance is available from the Department of Children, Schools and Families to support local authorities and schools, students and parents. Anita highlighted an example of best practice in Old Ford Primary School which involved working with school staff, students and parents.
- 6.3 The meeting discussed that this was an area that could be further developed within the borough. The Scrutiny Review on Reducing Youth Offending also highlighted bullying as a key cause for a lot of young people committing crime. This was an issue raised with Members of the Working Group by young people and parents who took part in interviews and focus groups held as part of the review. It was therefore agreed that the Council undertake further work with parents and community organisations working with different groups such as faith and third sector organisations.

⁴ www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Recommendation 1

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate works with schools to develop a mechanism to engage parents in anti-bullying initiatives. Furthermore, it also works with local third sector and faith organisations to raise awareness of dealing and responding to bullying.

- 6.4 Anti-Bullying Week is an annual UK event normally held in November which aims to raise awareness of bullying of children and young people, in schools and elsewhere, and to highlight ways of preventing and responding to it. The key theme for 2009 was Cyber bullying which has been identified as a rapidly emerging phenomenon which is not yet well understood by adults. It is the use of mobile phones, computers and the internet to bully people. Members noted that the Council had already been working with schools to develop appropriate policies and practices to deal with this but felt this needed to be recognised as a major issue in all schools and further work was needed to ensure all schools and youth facilities have developed appropriate measures.

Recommendation 2

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate work with local schools and youth to ensure their policies and practices have appropriate measures to deal with cyber bullying.

- 6.5 The meeting heard from Lucy Warwick (Education Champions Co-ordinator, Stonewall⁵). Members' attention was drawn to a report from Stonewall which focused on the experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools. It was noted that almost two thirds of young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people have experienced bullying. From these ninety two per cent have experienced verbal abuse and forty one per cent physical abuse.
- 6.6 Members considered a second report from Stonewall on how teachers feel about homophobic bullying. This noted that nine in ten secondary school teachers and more than two in five primary school teachers say children and young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, currently experience homophobic bullying. Secondary school teachers also say that homophobic bullying is the second most frequent form of bullying after bullying because of weight.
- 6.7 It was also outlined that nine in ten teachers and non-teaching staff at secondary and primary schools have never received any specific training on how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. Half of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools say the vast majority of incidents go unreported. A staff Member from a local primary school who was in attendance confirmed that school tend to deal with it as part of their overall anti-bullying initiatives. She highlighted there is a bigger challenge for the borough due to the diversity of the local population
- 6.8 Members discussed the experience of homophobic bullying generally within the borough. They agreed a key issue is the lack of understanding amongst young people of the impact of their actions. There is a national increase in homophobic

⁵ <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/>

hate crime but parts of the borough have seen some increase due to various factors including social deprivation. Members also noted that the lack of confidence amongst school staff to deal with homophobic bullying may also increase the problem further. Members therefore suggested that the Council support schools to undertake training and support their staff to raise awareness of homophobic bullying and also how to respond and prevent it. It may be useful to identify specific schools to undertake some initial dedicated support and then use them as best practice to roll out across the borough.

Recommendation 3

That the Childrens, Schools and Families Directorate support local schools to provide training and support to staff to deal with and respond to homophobic bullying.

6.9 Lucy also highlighted issues around homophobic language which tends to be used without thinking and is often ignored by teachers and school staff because either they feel it is difficult to know how to respond or they believe the language is used without any homophobic intent. When this is unchallenged it creates a culture of homophobia and can impact on young peoples sense of belonging, self-esteem and attainment at school. There is guidance and support available from Stonewall to deal with this and they have worked with local authorities to become Stonewall Education Champions. Members noted that Tower Hamlets had been working with Stonewall and this was now part of their Education Champions programme which allows local authorities to work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

7. Local Perspective

- 7.1 Jennifer Fear, Director of Step Forward a local youth organisation showed a DVD compiled by local youths on issues around homophobic bullying. The organisation provides a number support services for young people which includes managing the borough's anti-bullying helpline, providing 1-2-1 support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people and awareness raising for other young people.
- 7.2 The DVD highlighted the impact of homophobic bullying on victims and perpetrators and Members felt it was a really useful way of raising awareness amongst young people.
- 7.3 Kristie Millar, a Behaviour Support Worker from Redland Primary School attended the meeting and outlined some of the work undertaken in her school. She stated that the school had undertaken an enormous amount of work to develop their anti-bullying policy. There have not been many reports of bullying within the school maybe only 4-5 cases in the last 3 years. An important element of their work has been the support received from the Head Teacher.
- 7.4 The students and parents have also been involved in the development of the policy through active consultation. The result of the consultation had been feedback to all the stakeholders and a policy was agreed for the school. The school now has clear guidelines for reporting bullying as serious incidents which are reported to the school

Governors. There is a process in place to review the policy and ensure it is clear for everyone, in particular the students. It was also noted that the school used the local Imam and elders to get across important messages which they felt worked really well.

- 7.5 Liz Vickerie (Head of the Support for Learning Service) and Liam McQuade (Team Manager, Behaviour Support Team) presented the borough's anti-bullying initiatives and results of local views by parents and pupils. Liz outlined how the service was funded and that they are accountable to the Children's Trust Board. The borough has an Anti-bullying Steering Group which has key officers from across the Children, Schools and Families Directorate including the Youth Offending Team. The Behaviour Support Team has a key role in advising and monitoring policies in schools as well as other settings such as youth clubs and residential children's homes. They also provide guidance and undertake specific case work where the relationship between the school and family break down. In addition they provide guidance resource and co-ordinate the electronic survey of young people.
- 7.6 Members heard that the service was currently funding an anti-bullying helpline which was run by Step Forward. Unfortunately, the take up of this has been very slow and does not provide value for money. The meeting agreed that it would be useful to review this and use this funding to develop other innovative mechanisms to support young people needing help.

Recommendation 4

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate review the use of anti-bullying helpline and use funding from this to explore other innovative methods for young people to seek advice on bullying.

- 7.7 The Council provides support to School Governors in their role in reducing bullying and extensive support to schools in developing comprehensive anti-bullying policies. The national "Tellus"⁶ Survey which gathers children and young people's views on their life, their school and their local area showed that 62% of Tower Hamlets pupils say they have never been bullied at school which is higher than the national average of 56%. In addition, 38% of local pupils say the school dealt with bullying well or very well compared to 36% nationally. Furthermore a National Audit on Head teachers report also notes the borough's support for anti-bullying is in the top quartile.
- 7.8 In regards to taking forward the borough's work on anti-bullying, Members were informed that further work needed to be undertaken with the few remaining schools where policies still need more work. It was also noted that greater work was needed to firstly understand the issues around bullying for young people with disabilities and this was an issue identified by the service as part of an Equalities Impact Assessment of the Anti-Bullying policy. Members therefore felt it would be useful for the Council to ensure they undertake specific work to deal with bullying amongst disabled young people.

⁶ <http://www.tellussurvey.org.uk/default.aspx>

Recommendation 5

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate undertake further work with schools to ensure they develop greater understanding of the impact of bullying on disabled young people and develop policies to deal with this effectively.

- 7.9 Liam McQuade presented on the electronic survey undertaken in the borough of young peoples view on bullying. Around twenty schools took part which allows rapid analysis of results and establishing baseline. This is a key tool to listen to pupils and parents voices and inform the development of policy making and daily practice.
- 7.10 The meeting noted that there is huge local anxiety amongst young people about bullying and this ensures that the schools need to respond to this by developing appropriate measures to deal with these anxieties. It was agreed that a key issue is changing the culture within schools to ensure the anxiety expressed by young people also reflects the number of cases of reported bullying.
- 7.11 The meeting then discussed that there was a need to ensure work was also undertaken with the private schools in the borough. Members were informed that some of the Islamic Schools were working with the Local Authority but it was difficult to penetrate some of the other schools. It was agreed that this is an area that requires further development.

Recommendation 6

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate works with private schools and other private educational facilities such as Islamic after school classes to develop anti-bullying policies which is consistent with the borough's and national policies.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The Challenge Session was an opportunity for Members to understand the borough's approach to anti-bullying work. The session enabled Members to ask key questions around policies within local schools and identify any gaps.
- 8.2 Members noted that there has been substantial amount of work undertaken within the borough's schools and there are some very good practice examples. There is a need to undertake further work around specific issues such as homophobic, disability and cyber bullying. It was also noted that parents and the third sector have a key role in developing awareness in dealing and responding to instances of bullying. This session also provided Members who were on the Scrutiny Review on Reducing Youth Offending a greater understanding of how bullying is managed within the borough as they heard first hand from young people the link between bullying and youth crime.

11. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 11.1 This report describes the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools held in January 2010.

11.2 There are no specific financial implications emanating from this report but in the event that the Council agrees further action in response to this report's recommendations then officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

12. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

12.1 The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for Cabinet to provide a response.

12.2 The report contains recommendations which are capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. Paragraph 3.3 of the report correctly identifies the Council's duty under section 10 of the Children Act 2004. There is a further obligation on the Council under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to make arrangements to ensure that its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. If Cabinet supported the recommendations, it would be for officers to ensure that any action is carried out lawfully.

13. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

13.1 The Challenge Session considered issues around bullying for specific equalities strands and have made a number of recommendations for further developing policies and practices in schools and youth setting to deal with these effectively. An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken of the borough's anti-bullying policy in February 2009 which has also made a number of recommendations.

14. Risk Management

14.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the Challenge Session report or recommendations.

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Agenda Item 9.5

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Overview and Scrutiny	6 th April 2010	Unrestricted		
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): Afazul Hoque, Scrutiny Policy Manager		Title: Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2009/2010 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 2009/2010. 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 Agree that the report be submitted to Full Council.
- 2.3 Authorise the Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities to amend the final report before its submission to Council, after consultation with the Chair and relevant Scrutiny Leads.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (AS AMENDED) SECTION 100D (AS AMENDED) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

Annual Scrutiny Report File in Scrutiny Policy Team

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

Afazul Hoque
020 7364 4636

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 new Community Plan themes, with a further Lead for Excellent Public Services. 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 The Annual Scrutiny report will be submitted to the first full meeting of Council in the new Municipal Year. Following the report to Council, it will be circulated widely within the Council and across to its 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 This report details a summary by Scrutiny Lead Members of their Overview and Scrutiny work during the civic year 2009/2010.
- 5.2 The reviews include value for money issues that allow monitoring of the use of resources by the Council and as evidence to the Audit Commission's assessment of how well it is managing and using its resources to deliver value for money and better and sustainable outcomes for local people.
- 5.3 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 One Tower Hamlets Consideration

- 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 Reducing Worklessness, English for Speaker of Other Language and Strengthening Local Community Leadership.

7 Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

- 7.1 There are no direct implications.

8 Risk Management

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

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council
April 2010**

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

In Tower Hamlets, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee coordinates all Scrutiny work. It appoints the Vice Chair and six Scrutiny Leads. 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 lead the working groups within their theme.

Membership

Reflecting the overall political balance of the Council during 2009/10 the Committee's membership comprised six Labour councillors and one each from the Conservative, Respect and Liberal Democrat parties.

As well as the councillors, there are five education co-optee positions in the Committee. In 2009/10 only three of these positions were filled. Among them, there were two parent governors. Each of these representatives could contribute to any matters discussed by the Committee but they could only vote on education issues. The final member was 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. It is expected that two representatives will be appointed by the Anglican and Roman Catholic Dioceses in early 2010-11.

Scrutiny Chair and Leads

In 2009/10, the Chair of the Committee was Councillor Sirajul Islam. The Chair oversees the work programme of the committee as well as taking lead on monitoring the Council's budget.

Apart from Excellent Public Services, the other five themes which each Scrutiny Lead is responsible for are pillars of the boroughs Community Plan. The Scrutiny Leads were:

- Cllr Bill Turner (Labour) for "Excellent Public Services," focusing on improving public services to make sure they represent good value for money and meet local needs. He was also Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar (Labour) for "Prosperous Community," focusing on raising educational aspirations, expectations and achievement, and bringing investment into the borough and ensuring residents and businesses benefit from growing economic prosperity.
- Cllr Alex Heslop (Labour) for "Great Place to Live," focusing on improving housing and the environment and providing a wide range of arts and leisure services.
- Cllr Denise Jones (Labour) for "Safe and Supportive," focusing on reducing crime, making people feel safer and providing excellent services to the borough's most vulnerable communities.

- Cllr Ann Jackson (Labour) for “One Tower Hamlets,” focusing on reducing inequalities and improving community cohesion through community leadership.
- Cllr Tim Archer (Conservative) for “Healthy Community,” through the Health Scrutiny Panel, focusing on improving local health services and the co-ordination of different health service providers within the borough.

Scrutiny Leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders by conducting in-depth ‘Scrutiny Reviews’, which usually involve several meetings and visits to gather evidence on particular Council services. ‘Scrutiny Challenge Sessions’ are also undertaken by some Scrutiny Leads which are a one off meeting looking at a specific area of concern within the community.

In 2009/10, there were two other non-executive Members who also served on the Committee:

Cllr Abjol Miah
Cllr Stephanie Eaton

They have contributed both to the work of the Committee and Scrutiny Review Groups. In particular their contribution on the call-ins, scrutiny spotlights and performance monitoring have been really useful in holding the Executive to account and ensuring that our services meet the needs of our local residents. They have also been actively involved in a number of the Scrutiny Review Working Groups and contributed to the formation of a number of recommendations from those groups.

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.

As 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 other 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 relating to 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.

An emerging area for development replacing the Healthcare Commission’s Annual Health Check will be the Quality Accounts submitted to the Care Quality Commission where Health Scrutiny will have the opportunity to comment on these. This is an area that the Panel will be looking to develop over the next year.

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 2009/10. 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 Sirajul Islam, Chair

The Overview and Scrutiny arrangements in Tower Hamlets include:

- a single co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- five Scrutiny Leads scrutinising the Community Plan themes and one for Excellent Public Services
- pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports
- performance monitoring by considering the Tower Hamlets Index, Strategic Plan & Budget, the Diversity and Equality Action Plan, Corporate Complaints and Members' Enquiries
- a robust call-in procedure
- Holding the Executive to account through Scrutiny Spotlight for Cabinet Members
- A Health Scrutiny Panel to respond to consultation from NHS Trusts

We agreed a challenging and extensive work programme in July 2009 and I believe we have delivered on the majority of it. Over the year, we regularly 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. This is really important in making sure we hold the Executive directly to account and encouraging more discussion and debate amongst councillors.

There has also been a good level of engagement with the public. Firstly, the majority of our reviews sought the views and experiences of local people through visits and focus groups. And secondly, a number of deputations were made by members of the public at Committee, usually related to a call-in that was being considered.

Performance Monitoring

We monitor the Tower Hamlets Index (THI) regularly, quarterly the Council's Strategic Plan & Budget and twice a year we monitor the Diversity and Equality Action Plan. We are the only formal councillor forum that does this and it's important in making sure that our services are performing 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 monthly Scrutiny Spotlights at our Committee meetings for the Cabinet Members including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. At all the sessions Lead Members discussed the performance and challenges facing services in their area of responsibility. This was particularly useful for us to discuss issues of concern and suggest ways performance could be improved. It also helped involve Lead Members more in the scrutiny process and several of them commented how useful they found the opportunity to discuss policy and performance issues with non-executive councillors at Committee.

The Committee consistently challenged Cabinet Members on areas of underperformance, including anti-social behaviour, provisions for young people and perhaps most importantly on housing. This last area has been subject to a number of full-scale scrutiny reviews the past few years as well as a deputation involving up to 80 local residents who raised their concerns about the Blackwall Reach Regeneration. The committee was determined that the Council continues to explore improvements in housing for local residents.

We also considered the Council's annual Corporate and Social Care Complaints report. All councillors were pleased to see the improved performance in responding to complaints. Councillors take up many complaints each year, and getting a quick and full response is an essential part of that work. We welcomed the on-going work the Council was doing with local Registered Social Landlords and other partners to improve their performance and quality of response.

Policy Framework

Within the Council's Budget and Policy 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 and this year we discussed the following:

- **Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy**
The committee welcomed the strategy and raised a number of issues for Cabinet to consider including mechanisms for bringing intermediate housing within the reach of Borough residents, in accordance with the aim of providing affordable social housing. The committee also noted that development of the borough fringe areas, particularly the Bethnal Green/Hackney border, needed more attention to improve quality of the environment. Members also felt that outdated overcrowding standards were now inappropriate and required updating.
- **Gambling Policy**
The committee considered the Gambling Policy refresh and offered a number of comments for cabinet's consideration. Members raised concerns at the poor response rate to the consultation in particular the lack of consultation with religious organisations. It was suggested when the policy is reviewed again more extensive consultation be undertaken particularly with Children, School and Families Directorate, Local Area Partnerships and the services of the Council's Consultation and Involvement Team be utilised to ensure greater engagement. The saturation of gambling establishments within certain areas was also highlighted as an area which needed to be considered to ensure those areas do not become hotspot for gambling establishments. There is a need to do some work to highlight how residents can object to these establishments as the Committee felt local residents were not aware of the process.

Other Policy Work

The committee also considered a number of other policy area as part of its work and offered comments and recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

- **Third Sector Strategy**
The Committee welcomed the Third Sector Strategy and stated that transparency and accountability was needed in any allocation of funds to local groups. We considered that it would be helpful to compile a report of historical problems, challenges and mistakes from the past to signpost what needed to be avoided in the future. We recommended that a comprehensive piece of work be undertaken to better understand the types of third sector organisations that exist in Tower Hamlets. We also felt that clarity was needed to ensure geographical equity of service provision.
- **Transport for London (TfL) Red Route Network Investment Plan**
The Committee considered a presentation from representatives from TfL about their investment plans on the Red Route Network in particular within Tower Hamlets. The Committee raised a number of issues with them including issues around length of time it was taking in implementing some schemes, safety issues around Mile End Road and the junction of Whitechapel Road and Vallance Road, the poor investment in the

borough considering we have major roads into the City and also how we can further ensure local views can be better communicated to TfL..

- **Domestic Violence Service – Sustainable Funding**

As part of our monitoring of past scrutiny reviews the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive re-visited the review on Domestic Violence undertaken in 2005/06. One of the issues that were highlighted was around funding for key posts in the service. This included the Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse Worker and the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Service. The Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member who provided assurances that work was on going to secure sustainable funding for these key areas.

Scrutiny of the Budget

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

In July we considered the Resource Allocation and Budget Review 2010/11 – 2012/13 and supported the Council's approach in recognition of the strong financial management. However, we noted that public finances were severely in deficit and growth in public spending would need to be curtailed from the levels experienced over recent years in order to bring them back into balance. The Committee sought reassurances from the Lead Member that in this instance the Council's budget would be managed carefully to reduce the potential impact on our residents.

In February, we considered Cabinet's budget proposals for 2010/11. Committee Members challenged the Lead Member for Resources & Performance about the quality of consultation with residents and asked for improvements in future years. The Committee expressed concerns about overspends in a number of Council Directorates and generally supported the budget proposals, in particular for freezing Council Tax in 2010/11. The Committee also welcomed the proposed efficiency savings and additional investments proposed.

Pre-decision scrutiny

The committee can submit questions about Cabinet reports before a decision is taken. I feel we have strengthened this over the year and commented on 23 Cabinet reports (compared to 38 last year). Among these were:

- Children's Services Capital Spend
- Disposal of various Council owned properties
- Blackwall Reach Regeneration
- Ocean Estate Regeneration
- Leisure Facilities strategy
- Overcrowding Reduction Strategy
- Improving Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Poplar Baths Development Plans

Our questions and concerns provided further information at Cabinet and clarified some uncertainties thus improving the decision-making process. The responses also inform councillors' decisions over call-ins.

Call-ins

The Committee has considered five call-ins this year. This was consistent to last year and is a significant decrease from previous years.

Report Called-in	O&S Decision
Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project	Confirmed
Consideration of Individual Case for Severance	Referred back to Cabinet
Ideas Stores Strategy	Confirmed
Adoption of Street and Building Naming and Numbering Policy	Confirmed
Proposed Acquisition of Leasehold Interest at 585-593 Commercial Road, E1 and Temporary Relocation of Leven Road Car Pound	Confirmed

Debate of the call-ins was robust and rigorous. We confirmed all but one of the decisions of the Cabinet although on a number of these the Lead Members gave assurances that they would take some of the concerns raised on board. For example, on Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project the Committee made 4 recommendations to improve resident engagement and ensure they benefit from the regeneration which have been taken on by the Cabinet and updates have been provided to the Committee informing us on the development of this area.

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, including the 80 residents who attended the call-in involving Blackwall Reach. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny and highlight the important role it has within the borough.

Co-opted and Appointed Representatives

There has been some difficulty in appointing an Anglican and Catholic Diocese to the committee although a new policy framework is currently being drafted to ensure that a fully functioning committee is in place for 2010-11. We organised an Induction Session for current co-opted members and considered how we could develop their role and help them be more effective. We also welcomed a number of local residents onto many of the Scrutiny Working Groups. This has been particularly useful in bringing local residents views into our scrutiny reviews and also the development of a number of recommendations of the Working Groups.

We intend to build on this further next year to enable co-opted Members to help us engage more local residents in the scrutiny process and ensure that more of their concerns come to the Committee's attention.

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 2006 are being acted on or achieved.

In developing the first monitoring report all the Scrutiny Lead Members revisited a review within their portfolio area. This was undertaken through 1-2-1 meetings with Lead Officers from the service area of the review. This provided Members a useful way of monitoring the implementation of recommendations, identify key outcomes as a result of the review and also consider any difficulties around implementing recommendations. The details of these discussions are summarised below:

- Councillor Denise Jones revisited the Domestic Violence Review undertaken in 2005/06 and reported that progress had been made against all the recommendations. She highlighted the outcomes from the review were the production of the Domestic Violence booklets to raise awareness, the training of the Council's Customer Contact Centre and One Stop Shops staff to recognise Domestic Violence. A key concern she highlighted was funding to some of the specialist Domestic Violence services provided by third sector organisations.
- Councillor Alex Heslop considered the review on Leaseholders undertaken in 2006/07. He reported that of the 19 recommendations are all either completed or partially completed. This review has significantly improved the services received by Leaseholders particularly with an extensive staff training programme being developed and improved engagement with Leaseholders. In August 2009 Tower Hamlets Home also implemented a decentralised housing management system which provided Leaseholders greater access to key officers and solve problems more quickly.
- Councillor Ann Jackson revisited the Interpreting and Translating Service Challenge Session held in 2007/08. One of the key issues highlighted by this session was the link between English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision and the demand for interpreting and translating services in Tower Hamlets. Progress had been made against all the recommendations and significant funding had been secured for ESOL provision in the borough through the Working Neighbourhood Fund and the Council also allocating additional funding. There is also a strategic review taking place of interpreting and translation services which will support service planning and delivery.
- Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar reviewed the Graduate Unemployment Review undertaken in 2006/07. He highlighted that progress has been made against all but one of the recommendations, which is due to the lack of funding. There has been a positive impact from this review for graduates. There are opportunities for graduates to be employed in the Council and other places through schemes developed with the Partnership.
- Councillor Bill Turner considered the review on the Use of Consultants undertaken in 2007/08 and reported that progress has been made against all of the recommendations. The review has had a positive impact on the service with greater assurance that consultants are used in the right circumstances and their outputs are monitored and managed correctly. Furthermore Directorates are required to submit monthly reports to the Corporate Director of Resources on their use of consultants. Directorate Management Teams reviews the use of consultants on a regular basis.
- Councillor Tim Archer revisited the review on Access to GP and Dentistry Service undertaken in 2006/07 and reported that all the recommendations had been implemented or there was on-going work. There has been significant improvement in access to GP and Dentistry Services since this review was undertaken.

Raising the Profile

We continue to improve how and when we communicate with Members, Officers and the public. We used the weekly Members' Bulletin regularly. 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 be involved.

East End Life and our Scrutiny web pages are also vehicles to keep residents informed about the work scrutiny was undertaking. A number of the reviews attracted significant interest from

local people, particularly the Reducing Worklessness Amongst Young Adults 18-24 and Youth Offending reviews. More detail of these is included in the reports by the Scrutiny Leads.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 includes provision for CCfA that came into force on 1st April 2009. This means the Council is now under statutory obligation to provide Members the opportunity to refer to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) any local government matter where other methods of resolution have been exhausted.

OSC agreed a local proposal for implementing CCfA which includes pooling together the joint information gleaned from complaints, petitions, members enquiries and FOI requests into one performance report that can be used both corporately and by councillors to spot patterns and problem-solve on behalf of the community. This Performance Digest report will be prepared at six-monthly intervals for use at OSC to consider issues strategically and a local version would be presented to LAP Steering Group Members. The combination of the two would aim to ensure that both neighbourhood and borough-wide aspects are covered.

The Strengthening Community Leadership Scrutiny Review led by the Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets tested a mock performance digest report and how CCfA can be used by councillors to problem solve on behalf of their constituents. They have made a number of recommendations to improve the CCfA process which are detailed in the Scrutiny Lead's section of this report. A report outlining the CCfA proposals has been considered by all the Partnership Delivery Groups. While supporting the proposals the Groups were anxious that CCfA should not replicate work being undertaken elsewhere and not create a bureaucratic burden for partner organisations. They welcomed the opportunity to utilise the Performance Digest as a problem solving tool and use Members' community leadership role to develop and improve services. Similar discussions have also been held at the Health Scrutiny Panel about combining the complaints information from each of the three local NHS Trusts to create a more sophisticated tool for Members to help make improvement in the health sector. This was also discussed at the LAP Steering Group Conference in January 2010. There was a great deal of enthusiasm amongst LAP Steering Group Members to get involved in local problem solving and holding services to account at a local level.

Strengthening Local Democracy

The Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation paper was published in July 2009 proposing giving councillors greater power to scrutinise the spending and decisions of local service providers, extending scrutiny to issues not directly related to LAA targets. Scrutiny will also be extended to a wider range of partners e.g. utility companies and sub-regional partnerships. Our response to the consultation supports the principle of extending the scrutiny powers beyond the Council and health services as more and more work of non-executive councillors is cross-cutting and goes beyond organisational boundaries – and most residents are not interested in these boundaries when they raise concerns with their elected representatives. However we recognise the need for this to be proportionate, the complexity of making it happen and the need to ensure it delivers something useful.

In considering these 'new' powers it is worth reminding ourselves that there is already engagement from local partners in a number of ways. For instance, over the last three years the Borough Commander has always attended OSC to answer questions as part of the Lead Member for Cleaner, Safer, Greener's Scrutiny Spotlight. All of the reviews in this year's Work Programme involve partners and relate to the partnership improvement agenda identified in the Community Plan.

The Communities and Local Government Department have recently published their response to the consultation which notes overwhelming support for extending the scrutiny powers beyond LAA partners. The Government has sought the earliest opportunity to implement these proposals to broaden the powers of local authority scrutiny committees and extend them to cover a wide range of external bodies. A Private Member's Bill is currently being considered by Parliament which aims to establish a framework for enhanced local government scrutiny. As part of the discussion with the Community Plan Delivery Groups on CCfA the paper also asked the Partnership on how we could enhance the role of scrutiny within the Partnership. It was recognised that scrutiny had already been working with many of the partners over the last few years. There are opportunities to further strengthen this through developing the Scrutiny Leads role in the Delivery Groups, managing expectations of all stakeholders involved in scrutiny reviews and ensuring monitoring and follow up on review work is further developed to demonstrate the impact of scrutiny. It was also noted that scrutiny offers the Partnership the forum to discuss and resolve difficult issues with Members and local residents.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe the Overview & Scrutiny Committee 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 addressing local people's concerns – for example, around Strengthening Community Leadership, Reducing Childhood Obesity and improving housing in the Private Rented Sector.

This is an exciting time to be part of scrutiny with the emphasis the government has placed on strengthening local community leadership and increasing the involvement of local residents in the democratic process. I believe our work this year has equipped us to strengthen the impact of the committee in the future.

I was pleased to continue with my role for Excellent Public Services in 2009-2010. This year saw my involvement in two key scrutiny challenge sessions: Dangerous dogs and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) both struck a chord with the community and were very well attended by our local residents.

Dangerous Dogs

A challenge session was arranged to highlight the issue of dangerous dogs and to consider residents' views about the subject. Over 70 residents attended the session that included presentations from the Metropolitan Police, the Council's Animal Warden Service and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

The key aims were to increase Members understanding of the issue, to consider and evaluate the Council's approach to dealing with the rise of dangerous dogs, to provide residents with an opportunity to express their views and concerns and assist in developing recommendations for future approaches to dealing with this issue.

The members of the session noted that it had become a growing trend to use dogs as a weapon to settle scores between gangs, and for organised dog fighting. The Council's Animal Warden Service had taken in over 170 stray dogs since 1st April 2008, and 140 of them were Staffordshire bull terriers or similar crossbreeds. Of these, it was reported that 105 had to be put down.

It was argued during this session that it was important to tailor recommendations to tackle irresponsible dog ownership so that it incorporates both education and enforcement elements. Enforcement action was viewed as a more serious consideration. However, Members and residents argued that in some serious instances where animal cruelty or human safety needs to be protected, it may be the only option.

The recommendations covered a wide range of areas including the need for the Animal Warden Service to work with schools to develop interactive activities for children of all ages, encouraging them to think about dog welfare and responsible ownership as well as promoting responsible pet ownership at local community events and through East End Life. Moreover, it was emphasised that a partnership amongst Animal Welfare Officers, the Council, Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Registered Social Landlords, Status Dogs Unit, the Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers and the RSPCA be officially set up to work together on dog welfare and ownership issues.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

The second scrutiny challenge session I oversaw looked at ESOL provision in the borough with a particular focus on Tower Hamlet College. ESOL provision remains the largest single curriculum area offered by the College. 43% of all adult students are on ESOL courses. Provision is offered from Entry Level through to Level 2. In June 2009 the College commenced a consultation with staff and Trade Unions regarding proposals for cost savings of £1.75 million for the academic year 2009/10. The consultation paper highlighted the financial and educational challenges facing the College and the inevitable shortfalls that these cuts would bring. The important need for ESOL provision within the borough is well understood by all the key stakeholders. The aim of this session was to develop Members' understanding on the

impact of the ESOL cuts occurring at Tower Hamlets College and to consider the current and future provision of ESOL services in the borough.

At the challenge session, evidence was received from the University and College Union, an ESOL lecturer from Tower Hamlets College, the Head of Lifelong Learning and the Skills for Life Manager at Tower Hamlets Council. Two documents were also tabled by the Learning and Skills Council and the Principle of Tower Hamlets College. Discussions centred on national cuts in ESOL provisions which have impacted on Tower Hamlets as well as the future of local ESOL provisions.

Five recommendations were devised during the session. These include investigating the issuing of bogus Skills for Life certificates and ESOL qualifications by some private colleges in the borough and lobbying the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Mayor of London for further entry level ESOL provisions.

I believe that the issues around ESOL provisions and the concerns raised by both residents and staff from the college are increasingly important to our borough especially considering that half the total population are from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities and the fact that many new communities will be moving into the borough which will contribute to a changing profile over the next ten years.

Conclusion

These challenge sessions were well attended by councillors and residents highlighting their importance locally. I hope our recommendations support policy developments in these areas and address residents concerns. Finally I would like to thank all those who participated in these challenge sessions and shared their invaluable experiences and also contributed immensely to the final recommendations.

Prosperous Community

Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar

As the Scrutiny Lead for a Prosperous Community my portfolio ranges from education, employment and skills, economic development and reducing poverty in the communities of Tower Hamlets. I was keen to explore worklessness amongst young adults in the borough as this is a key issue for local residents. The borough has more than two jobs available for every resident but yet we have one of the highest concentrations of economic inactivity in the country. The importance of worklessness locally is also highlighted in our Community Plan where it is seen as a key priority for the Partnership.

Reducing Worklessness amongst Young Adults 18-24

The review focused on what the Council and its partners can do to reduce worklessness in the borough and what early intervention methods can be implemented to deter a future generation of worklessness.

From the outset of this review I was very keen to get resident involvement and hence three local residents were co-opted onto the working group. Furthermore, of the seven sessions that we undertook, two of these included focus groups with young adults who are economically inactive and living in the borough. This gave Members first hand experience of some of the barriers that young adults face.

We gathered evidence from a range of different stakeholders including national and regional organisations including the London Development Agency and the Host Boroughs Unit. In addition, we undertook a workshop with eight third sector organisations and discussed the issue with a number of different Council services such as Skillsmatch and the HUB.

Our recommendations included increasing employment opportunities for women, ex-offenders and the most vulnerable, and strengthening both the role of the third sector and community leaders in reducing worklessness. We were also keen to introduce greater careers education in primary schools and encourage all young people to leave compulsory education with an employment and skills qualification.

Conclusion

The timeliness of this review, given the recent recession has been most welcome. Reducing worklessness is a complex issue within the community but I am convinced that the working group's recommendations can improve the opportunities available to young adults locally to secure employment and in turn create further prosperity for all our residents.

My portfolio as the Scrutiny Lead for A Great Place to Live includes aspects ranging from housing and development, environment, the arts and leisure. To build on previous years scrutiny review on housing I decided to look at the important area of housing in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), as this is an area which has in the past year or so received a tremendous amount of negative publicity. The borough has some of the best PRS properties in the country but it also has some of the worst properties. It is an issue which a number of residents have raised with councillors and with the growing number of PRS properties in the borough an issue we could improve.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS)

The PRS review primarily looked at improving the health aspect of those residing in private rented housing and in particular the role of landlords. The reviews key aims included:

- To analyse issues facing tenants of the Private Rented Sector
- To identify gaps in the support available to tenants of the Private Rented Sector
- To examine issues that may effect landlords who are renting out to tenants
- To analyse the growing number of private tenants of council leaseholders and how the council should interact with such tenants

The working group heard evidence from a range of national organisations such as the National Landlords Association, Praxis and Crises. In addition, we heard from Tower Hamlets Homes, Queen Mary College and Registered Social Landlords. Furthermore a number of Council services also presented on aspects of the PRS.

We have made a number of recommendations including the need to develop a new Private Housing Strategy for the borough. A key feature of the review was also to support and strengthen good landlords in the borough and in turn drive out poor landlords. The working group acknowledged the importance of the PRS and the need to utilise the sector more. We believe through the evidence that there is a need to publicise both the Landlords Forum more and those Landlords who are accredited. The working group also believes strongly that considering the high number of leaseholders who are sub-leasing their properties, the Council should actively explore developing a full management service for these landlords.

Conclusion

The PRS is a very important sector within the borough and one that needs to be better utilised. We hope our review and recommendations will help to improve the quality of life for residents who reside in this sector by adding value to the existing work of the Council and its partners in strengthening the PRS.

Safe and Supportive Cllr Denise Jones

The aim of the safe and supportive theme is to create a Tower Hamlets where crime is rare. It is to be tackled in an effective manner, so that all communities are able to live in peace. The Community Plan recognises that it is the most disadvantaged people who are often most at risk of becoming both offenders and victims of crime. With this in mind, I have used this year's work program to focus on ways the Council and its partners can support some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Therefore, I have led a review into youth offending and a Scrutiny Challenge into anti-bullying initiatives at schools.

Youth Offending: Supporting Vulnerable Young People

Youth crime is a concern that residents continue to raise with Councillors. It also affects not only victims and perpetrators but their families and the wider community. This review aimed to find feasible solutions to preventing youth crime. The review examined the current preventative initiatives used by the Young Offenders Team (YOT), the national agenda on youth crime, issues that could lead to criminal activity such as lack of housing and the reasons that young people become involved in youth crime.

The Working Group visited Huntercombe Youth Offending Institute and Thames Youth Court, interviewed young people who were on a number of different preventative programmes run by the YOT, held a focus group with parents of young offenders, and had meetings with the Council's Youth and Community service and YOT, the Police, the Youth Justice Board and a local Magistrate. We then considered this evidence alongside the national evidence.

It was clear to us that there is no one cause for youth offending or re-offending. We found that the borough's YOT was performing really well compared to our statistical neighbours and worked well with partners. However, we felt there were areas which we could improve and our recommendations include ways youth offenders could be properly resettled after conviction, how we could re-engage young people with the education system to lessen their risk of offending, supporting families to deal with young offenders and developing our frontline staff to support the YOT in helping young people avoid offending.

Anti-bullying Challenge Session

The stress for victims of bullying can have far reaching effects on their personal and social development. It can also impact on the educational achievement of them and their peers. Therefore I wanted to have a challenge session which considered our local anti-bullying initiatives and how this compared to other areas. We noted that substantial amount of work had been undertaken in the borough's schools and there are best practice examples of anti-bullying work. We have made six recommendations on developing resilience to bullying in the borough and this includes developing specific work around homophobic, disability and cyber bullying and working with parents and third sector organisations to raise awareness.

Conclusion

I have enjoyed being the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive this year. It has allowed me to explore challenging issues that affect vulnerable members of our community. I believe both these issues can have a huge impact on the future of our young people and support our aim of developing a safe and cohesive community.

As Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets, my remit focuses on ensuring Tower Hamlets is a place people feel a part of and are able to freely live in. To achieve this it is vital that there is a strong element of community leadership within Tower Hamlets. Community leadership ensures that the community are involved in the decision making and that Councillors are able to promote the well being of their area. Last year, I led a review into Child Poverty where we successfully developed a model of community leadership which enabled councillors to identify residents who collectively might represent the diversity of Tower hamlets and interview them about their experiences of child poverty. In developing a better understanding of our local residents needs we were able influence policy and service development. Therefore, in an attempt to explore how community leadership could be strengthened, I decided to carry on the work we had started in the Child Poverty review and have undertaken a review into this important area.

Scrutiny Review: Strengthening Local Community Leadership

This review aimed to further develop Members awareness of the national drivers which are trying to strengthen the leadership part of their roles, question how we could scrutinise our partners and test the community leadership model of Councillor Call for Action (CCfA).

The Working Group found that there were already a number of initiatives in place to allow local residents to take a more active role in their community such as Council Committees, Local Area Partnership structures and other forums such as the Interfaith Forum, the LGBT Community Forum or Pan Disability Panel. However, there are a number of things the Council could do to bring democracy further to the local community and improve the working relationship between Members and their constituents.

To this end, the Working Group made a number of recommendations in three key areas. The first was to look at how the Council could develop a new model of community leadership. The Working Group felt that the proposals developed for Councillor Call for Action offered a real opportunity for Councillors and residents to take an active role in problem-solving. The second was around improving resident participation through better communications and systems. The final area was to look at improving engagement of Councillors and residents through the Partnership, which included a recommendation that ward councillors have an allocated budget.

Conclusion

I was grateful for the opportunity to carry out this interesting review. I feel that if these recommendations are implemented we will be able to improve the state of democracy in Tower Hamlets. It is through such improvement that, as a Council, we will be able to ensure that the services we offer to our residents are what they need and want.

The Health Scrutiny Panel undertakes the Council's functions under the Health and Social Care Act, 2001. The Panel includes members who are co-opted from the Tower Hamlets Involvement Network (THINK) to represent patient views as well as our health partners at NHS Tower Hamlets, East London NHS Foundation Trust and Barts and the London NHS Trust.

This was the final year of the four-year work programme developed by the Health Scrutiny Panel. We looked to build on the work undertaken in the last three years by retaining the focus on reducing health inequalities.

Scrutiny Review: Reducing Childhood Obesity – Increasing the availability of healthy choices

The key health scrutiny review this year looked at reducing childhood obesity with a focus on promoting healthy eating by increasing the availability of and access to healthy food choices and reducing the availability of and access to foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt.

Tower Hamlets has the 3rd highest level of childhood obesity in the country. It is the only London borough to be awarded 'healthy town' status as part of the Government's Change 4 Life initiative.

The Health Scrutiny Panel were keen to ensure that their work added value to existing work that had taken place in the borough on tackling obesity. The Panel considered how the Council might directly address the problem with the proliferation of fast-food outlets, particularly in the vicinity of schools, and the quality of the food they provide.

In carrying out the review the Group looked at whether local or national legislation such as the Sustainable Communities Act or the London Acts could help to limit the further spread of fast food outlets and examined the lettings policies of public sector landlords and Registered Social Landlords with regards to fast food outlets to identify what action can be taken. We also examined the possibility of Tower Hamlets offering healthy free school meals for all and how we can increase children's access to healthy breakfast clubs through extended schools.

The working group met three times to collect evidence from a range of sources and key stakeholders, including Tower Hamlets Planning Team and Children, Schools and Families Directorate. The Group also carried out focus groups with families.

Health for North East London – Joint Overview Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)

Health for North East London (H4NEL) is the NHS programme review, run on behalf of the north east London's Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and acute hospital trusts. The aim of the health for north east London consultation are to significantly improve the health of thousands of patients and ensure the NHS delivers the best possible care by taking advantage of new medical developments and improving the way it delivers care to patients. It intends to do this by bringing some services closer to people's homes and centralise others to provide better specialist care.

Cllr Sirajul Islam, Cllr Ann Jackson and myself were nominated to represent the borough on the Inner North East London JOSC with Members from the London Boroughs of Hackney, Newham and the City of London. We considered and responded to the proposals set out in the

PCT consultation document, and examined whether the Health for North East London proposals would deliver better healthcare for the people of North East London. The JOSC had the opportunity to collect evidence from clinical specialists, the London Ambulance Service, Transport for London and service users to reach its conclusions.

The public consultation for H4NEL ends on 22nd March 2010 and the INEL JOSC will submit its report with recommendations on 14th April 2010.

Evaluation of the 4 year programme

As the Health Scrutiny Panel's four-year work programme approached its end. It was agreed in October 2009 that it would be beneficial for an external evaluation. The evaluation was based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's principles of good scrutiny and tested views from across the authority and its partners on the effectiveness of the four-year programme. The bulk of the evaluation took place in January and early February 2010. The approach was based on a review of extensive documentation from the Council and all health partners; a range of interviews with Members, council officers and health partner's personnel as well as an observation of the Health Scrutiny Panel meeting on 26th January 2010.

It is an important piece of work identifying both strengths and weaknesses as well as providing recommendations for improvements to the Panel as we look to the 2010/2011 programme.

The evaluation recognises that Tower Hamlets has built strong foundations for its health scrutiny function but there are improvements that need to be made. Particularly in relation to improving the partnership approach to health scrutiny and developing the Health Scrutiny Panel's abilities and Member's community leadership role. The suggestions will assist Members and all health partners to make the journey as one contributor in the report quotes "from good to great."

Conclusion

It has been another positive and very full year for the Health Scrutiny Panel. We have considered a number of key reports through the formal Panel meetings which included consultation on PCT managed practices and NHS Tower Hamlets Commissioning Strategic Plan and annual complaints reports from Bart's and the London NHS Trust and NHS Tower Hamlets. We have also monitored review from previous years through updates on progress of implementing our recommendations and are pleased to report the positive work the Council and the NHS Tower Hamlets have undertaken to implement our recommendations.

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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