

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2010

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

Members Present:

Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair)

Councillor Tim Archer

Councillor Rajib Ahmed

Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Lesley Pavitt

Other Councillors Present:

Co-opted Members Present:

Jake Kemp	– (Parent Governor Representative)
Mr Mushfiq Uddin	– (Muslim Community Representative)
Mr Ahbab Miah	– (Parent Governor Representative)

Guests Present:

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Officers Present:

Afazul Hoque	– (Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
David Galpin	– (Head of Legal Services (Community), Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Mohammed Ahad	– (Scrutiny Policy Officer, Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Hafsha Ali	– (Acting Joint Service Head Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Kevan Collins	– (Chief Executive)
Amanda Thompson	– (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rabina Khan and Co-opted Member Canon Michael Ainsworth.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

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

RESOLVED

That subject to an amendment to Councillor Lesley Pavitt's update at agenda item 9.1 the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 October 2010 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None received.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no reports called in from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 October 2010.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

The Chair welcomed Kevan Collins to the meeting and thanked him for agreeing to attend the Committee's first spotlight on the Chief Executive.

A comprehensive document detailing the Council's Achievements, Aspirations and Challenges had been circulated to all Members of the Committee prior to the meeting and the presentation focused on the key parts of this.

The Chief Executive spoke of the arrival of a new elected Mayor for the first time in Tower Hamlets which came at a time of unprecedented challenges

facing local government, and Tower Hamlets Council in particular, and also reported that the Government Spending Review had announced a 27% reduction in central government funding, coupled with additional cuts of about 45% in capital funding. These cuts were significantly front-loaded creating the need for immediate decision making and action in a short space of time.

However there remained prospects for continued improvement some of which would be delivered as part of the Community Plan Refresh due to take place in Spring 2011, and also the Council's Transformation Agenda which was based around 3 key goals – becoming more lean, flexible and citizen centred which would enable the Council to address those challenges.

Members of the Committee asked questions on a number of related issues including the possibility of collecting business rates from Canary Wharf, supporting residents to access services online, protection of frontline services and the need to establish exactly what was regarded as 'frontline', use of S106 monies, the use of co-operatives, the changes to the Child Benefits structure and the impact this would have on the Borough, the impact of the growing population, the use of volunteers to monitor contracts, the possibility of sharing key officer posts with neighbouring Boroughs, introduction of the Housing Benefit cap, nomination rights to houses built for the Olympics, the future of partnership working and the role of Scrutiny under the new Mayor.

The Chief Executive responded in detail to the questions raised, highlighting in particular:

- Government plans for a 'Business Incentive Bonus' which would provide prospects for supporting local business and provide benefits to the local area
- The dangers of reducing access to services with the loss of One Stop Shops and the importance of establishing what could be provided online
- The need to support residents in accessing online services
- The importance of recognising the role of both frontline and back office staff and need to protect 'outcomes'
- The use of S106 monies would not enable recurring savings but would possibly be used to fund further much needed education provision
- The need to support residents in changing behaviour to allow them to take a more proactive role in their local community
- The Council's action plan to support the families who would be affected by the changes to Benefits and the requirement to start driving down private landlord rents

- The obligation to meet the more complex needs of residents and the requirement to 'do more with less' and find more innovative ways of working
- The need to support residents in acquiring the skills necessary to find work
- The importance of maintaining good relationships and working more flexibly with partners, which would be considered at a 'Budget Congress' in a few weeks' time.
- The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and comprehensive responses to questions

8. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Scrutiny Challenge Session - Raising Participation in Post 16 Learning in Tower Hamlets

The Chair presented the report detailing the Scrutiny Challenge Session undertaken by Councillor Rabina Khan.

The session had sought to examine issues around educational participation of 16-18 year olds with the aim of increasing the number of young people who stay on in education and training. Over 30 people attended the session including young people, Head Teachers, third sector representatives and Councillors.

There were 6 recommendations arising from this which focused on the role of parents, links between education and employment, developing personalised services, advice and guidance for young people and supporting vulnerable young people.

RESOLVED

That the outcomes of the Scrutiny Challenge Session be noted.

9. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Councillor Ahmed Omer – Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets – Scrutiny Review On Supporting New Communities, A Case Study of the Somali Community

Councillor Omer reported that during the first two sessions the Panel had heard from a range of representatives from the Greater London Authority, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Migrants Rights Network and also the Councils third sector team on grass roots organisations who were supporting new communities

At the last session there had a round table discussion with various services including Education, Health, Employment, the Police and Housing. The key aim of this session was to identify how services could improve partnership working during a period of efficiency savings and the loss of significant government funding.

Councillor Omer advised that future sessions would take the form of focus groups with local residents and would include sessions with young people, Community Luncheon Clubs, and Somali women and new migrants.

Cllr Rajib Ahmed, Scrutiny Lead for Excellent Public Services - Scrutiny Review on Citizen Engagement Strategy

Councillor Ahmed reported that his Review Panel had visited the Community Champion workshop at IDEA Store Whitechapel on 30 October, as this project would feed into the development of the Council's Citizen Engagement Strategy. Approximately fifteen community champions had participated and the intention now was to develop a community champion scheme for Tower Hamlets.

Councillor Ahmed had also chaired a Scrutiny Challenge Session on Citizen Engagement Strategy on 4 November, during which over 20 people including Councillors, Third Sector organisations and local residents had participated.

The aims of the session had been to examine the Citizen Engagement Strategy in its development process, and make recommendations to be incorporated into the Strategy.

Councillor Ahmed advised that he would also be chairing a Scrutiny Challenge Session on Customer services at M73 on 25 November to consider efficient and effective access to customer services for all residents. He urged as many Members to attend as possible.

Councillor Lesley Pavitt – Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive Communities - Scrutiny Review on Safeguarding Adults at Risk

Councillor Pavitt reported that 3 sessions for this review had now taken place which had included:

- looking at the current national and local policies concerning safeguarding adults at risk with evidence provided by the Councils Safeguarding Team.
- A visit to Toynbee Hall to find out about the Dignify project which aimed to raise awareness amongst older people and professionals about what elder abuse was.

- A visit and tour of Sonali Gardens day care centre to find out about the services they delivered and a round table discussion with the centre's Manager.

Councillor Pavitt advised that the next session concerning financial abuse would take place on Monday 15th November 2010.

Councillor Tim Archer – Scrutiny Lead for Healthy Communities and Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Archer updated the Committee on issues that had been discussed at the last meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel held in October which included:

Access to GP services – the Ocean Estate

- GP Surgery being moved as part of regeneration of Ocean Estate
- Improved services including a Dental Practice and Pharmacy in the same building
- Concerns around consultation and involvement of local residents
- HSP to consider outcome from consultation and update on progress at the next meeting or may arrange a meeting in the Ocean Estate on this.

Joint Report on Complaints across the three local Trusts –

- First time report being jointly presented gave a better understanding of patients concerns regarding health services in the Borough
- Concerns expressed about the complaints process and the huge number of complaints at Barts and the London NHS Trust.

East London and City Alliance Commissioning Strategy Plan Update

- This Strategy updated HSP on plans to reduce the financial gap
- Discussion issues around services which may be reduced or stopped
- Will be discussed at a future HSP meeting once further details have emerged

THINK Report

- Really useful report giving detailed information on residents concerns with health and social care services
- May be useful for other Members to have a look at
- HSP to consider response of local health trusts to these concerns

Councillor Archer also reported that a Challenge Session on Polysystems had been held on 29th September, the purpose of which had been to:

- Examine the local picture and what reconfiguration of local primary care and social care services will mean for residents.
- Increase Members understanding around the key issues to enable them to use their community leadership role to communicate change to residents
- Listen to local GPs and hear their opinions on the re-provision of local healthcare services.
- Make recommendations on how the Council could better engage residents in this process and communicate change.

It had been a really useful session well attended by Members, residents and NSH Colleagues.

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

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

RESOLVED

That the following Section 1 pre-decision question be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:

7.1 Determination of School Admission Arrangements for 2012/13 (CAB 053/101)

Appendix A (iii) relating to priority geographical areas states that Children living in the "south Wapping" priority area have priority for admission to the dedicated schools, Mulberry and Stepney Green. These are single sex (Mulberry Girls, Stepney Green Boys). Why are children not being given an admission priority to a "comprehensive" (i.e. co-ed) education?

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

None.

The meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Ann Jackson

Overview & Scrutiny Committee