

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 5 APRIL 2011

**C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,
LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair)

Councillor Tim Archer
Councillor Lesley Pavitt
Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Stephanie Eaton

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr Mushfique Uddin – (Muslim Community Representative)
Canon Michael Ainsworth – (Church of England Diocese Representative)
Jake Kemp – (Parent Governor Representative)
Rev James Olanipekun – (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Ohid Ahmed
Councillor Alibor Choudhury
Councillor Carlo Gibbs
Councillor Amy Whitelock
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Rabina Khan

Guests Present:

Officers Present:

Afazul Hoque – (Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services (Community), Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Jackie Odunoye – (Service Head Strategy, Innovation and Sustainability, Development & Renewal)
Colin Cormack – (Service Head Housing Options, Development & Renewal)

Jebin Syeda	– (Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Nick Smales	– (Service Head 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games, Development & Renewal)
Heather Bonfield	– (Interim Service Head Cultural Services , Communities Localities & Culture)
Michael Keating	– (Service Head, One Tower Hamlets)
Amanda Thompson	– (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed Omer and Fozol Miah.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Alibor Choudhury, Rabina Khan and Rania Khan declared personal and prejudicial interests in agenda item 6.1 on the basis that they were Members of the Cabinet when the original decision was taken, and all left the room during the Committee's decision making and voting on this item.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 March 2011 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

There were no petitions formally received under this item however Councillor Marc Francis submitted a petition containing 400 signatories as part of the Call-in requisition detailed at 5.1 on the agenda.

5. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

5.1 Report Called In - Commercial Activities in Victoria Park

Further to their respective declarations of personal and prejudicial interests, Councillors Alibor Choudhury, Rabina Khan and Rania Khan left the room during the Committee's decision making and voting on this item.

Councillor Ohid Ahmed who had not been present for the previous agenda item also left the room during this time.

The Committee considered a presentation of the Call-in by Councillors Marc Francis and Amy Whitelock who detailed the reasons for the Call-in and the alternative courses of action proposed. Councillor Francis also submitted a petition on behalf of four hundred local residents.

Committee Members put detailed questions to both Councillors on a number of issues including the historical use of the site, the growth of annual events, whether or not the London Borough of Hackney had been approached regarding a financial contribution, the amount of income Tower Hamlets actually received, whether or not consultation had taken place with residents adjacent to the four proposed new sites, and why alternate methods of funding had not been sought for Paradise Gardens.

The Lead Member for Regeneration, Councillor Rania Khan, and Heather Bonfield, Interim Service Head - Cultural Services, responded on behalf of the Cabinet commenting that the policy sought to achieve a careful balance between the needs of the local community and that of the Council to generate income, with the number of commercial and non commercial events proposed making this viable.

The Council was required to find savings of £72 million over the next 3 years and to achieve this income needed to be generated. It was not possible to hold all the free community events as well as reducing the number of commercial events.

After the 'Radiohead' event the Council had commissioned a specialist external review of the Park to determine the optimum location of the infrastructure for events, the maximum sound levels that should be permitted, a risk assessment relating to the number of events that should be permitted and arrangements to ensure that robust controls were in place during events to ensure that sound limits were not exceeded. These had operated successfully and in 2010 an average of less than ten complaints per event had been received.

The noise in parks was monitored by sound specialists at specific points throughout the event season and a report prepared suggesting any improvements which could be made for the following year. Victoria Park was 218 acres whereas the shielded site was around 39 acres, which is only 18% of the park.

Approval for 'Lovebox' had not been granted primarily to fund the Fireworks event. One of the benefits of the programme was that it had enabled the promotion of community events including the annual Fireworks event, but the

two were not inextricably linked. One of the problems with the Fireworks event was that its attendance has grown exponentially over the past three years – from 45,000 in 2008, to over 60,000 in 2009 and over 90,000 in 2010, and there was no way to control attendances which had resulted in spiralling costs.

“Paradise Gardens” was much enjoyed by the community and the loss of the event was regrettable, however it was one of two free events that attracted 150,000 people over 3 event days resulting in considerable disruption for the local community.

In response to questions the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were advised that the Council was currently committed to four events and could be liable for any costs already incurred by the event organisers if these were now cancelled.

Consultation would need to be not only with residents living next to the park as the benefits were enjoyed by a much wider group of people. The historically low level of complaints about events indicated that there was only a relatively small number of people who felt strongly about this issue.

If the events were reduced to six the firework display would not be feasible. The cost was high because of the large number of people and the measures needed to ensure their safety.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the lack of consultation with residents, and the fact that a serious approach to Hackney Council regarding a financial contribution to the cost of the firework display had not been made. The options for further funding provision to secure the future of Paradise Gardens also needed to be explored.

After considering the views and comments made by the Members presenting the call-in, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration - Councillor Rania Khan, and Mrs Heather Bonfield, Interim Service Head, Cultural Services, the Committee:

RESOLVED

not to endorse the Cabinet’s provisional decisions but instead ask the Cabinet to give further consideration to the alternative course of action proposed by the call-in Members as follows:

- 1) That the Mayor restrict the number of commercial events in Victoria Park during the summer of 2011 to a maximum of six days/nights.
- 2) That the Mayor publish details of the income generated from the commercial events in 2010.

- 3) That the Mayor undertake consultation with residents of those wards surrounding Victoria Park about the maximum number of events that should be held in future years.
- 4) That the Mayor continue the Victoria Park fireworks display, and formally ask LBH to contribute to the cost of this event.
- 5) That the Mayor to continue the popular Paradise Gardens event, exploring ways to reduce the cost.

6. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Councillor Rabina Khan, Lead Member for Housing, had circulated a detailed presentation on aspects of her portfolio prior to the meeting which focused on areas set out below:-

Achievements

- Tower Hamlets Homes awarded 2 stars and £94.5m Decent Home Funding secured.
- Awarded £96.8m in 10/11 delivering over 600 affordable homes in Tower Hamlets.
- Progress on Ocean and Blackwall Reach Regeneration Schemes.
- Over 230 overcrowded households re-housed through RTB Buy Back.
- New Lettings Policy Implemented.
- Number of Households in T.A. dropped below 1,800.
- 190 DFGs approved and 137 delivered.
- Cost of T.A. re-negotiated saving £1.5M and £0.9M savings made from the Lean Programme.

Priorities

- New Housing Strategy to reflect Localism Bill.
- Delivering Decent Homes.
- Options Appraisal for Housing Management.
- Reduce Overcrowding.
- Develop an affordable housing product for Tower Hamlets.
- Continue to deliver 1000 units of affordable units per year.
- Implement changes to Leaseholder Services.
- Oceans Estate refurbishment works.

Challenges

- Welfare Reform.
- Delivery of Decent Homes.
- Continue Supply of New and Affordable Housing.
- Manage Demand for Housing.
- Reduce Carbon Emissions.
- Improve Health and Reduce Inequality for Elderly and Children.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee then posed a series of questions to which Councillor Khan, supported by Ms Jackie Odunoye, Service Head Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability, and Mr Colin Cormack, Head of Homeless and Housing Advice Services responded. The question and answer session was centred on the following points:

- The future of the Right To Buy Scheme, particularly in relation to properties transferred to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)
- A request for more information on overcrowding and the number of children sharing bedrooms
- The need to reduce CO2 emissions
- Relationship and contract management with major regeneration RSL partners
- Clarification of the housing options for residents with medical needs, including those in private rented accommodation as well as those on the Council's waiting list.
- The importance of retaining young people in the area and exploring what would be affordable to local residents
- The impact of the planned changes to Housing Benefit
- The availability and provision of incentives to move for residents and families currently under-occupying their homes
- Pan-Mobility and whether the Council could limit the number of people who were not from Tower Hamlets registering on the housing waiting list

The Chair thanked Councillor Khan and officers for the presentation and their responses to questions.

7. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Draft Employment Strategy

Councillor Rania Khan, Lead Member for Regeneration, and Mr Nick Smales, Service Head, 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games, had been invited to the meeting at the request of the Chair to enable the Committee to comment on the Council's draft Employment Strategy which had recently been out for consultation.

Mr Smales gave a detailed presentation in addition to the written report setting out how the Council would attempt to meet its strategic aim of increasing the employment rate of residents in the Borough over the next five years.

The question and answer session focused on the following points:

- As well as matching to existing jobs it was also important to try and shape the future job market and encourage more businesses into the area.
- The importance of raising aspirations and considering how the strategy linked up with schools, local colleges and universities
- Specific actions on how to continue developing more sophisticated understanding of barriers to employment specifically for hard to reach communities and different equalities groups, and test the accuracy of perceived barriers, for example that there may be cultural reasons why some sections of communities are prevented from working
- Lack of English language skills remained a significant problem amongst those not working and it was essential that tackling this particular barrier was given the priority it deserved.
- 'Skillsmatch' did not feature in the strategy as this was a delivery mechanism, not something that would help ensure delivery.
- The requirement to use local labour and supplies was often written into S106 agreements and maintenance contracts for Registered Social Landlords.
- Details of the consultation outcomes would be made available once they had been considered by the Mayor's Advisory Board.
- More basic skills training and apprenticeships were needed.
- How geographical boundaries can be broken down to support residents access jobs across London.
- Although no figures for those undertaking voluntary work had been included, the relevance of this had been acknowledged and would possibly be considered later at a later date.

Members of the Committee thanked Councillor Khan and Mr Smales for providing a clear and concise report which had given an excellent snapshot of the challenges ahead.

RESOLVED

That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

8.1 Strategic Plan 2011/12: Outline Plan and Year 1 Action Plan

Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Lead Member for Resources, and Michael Keating, Service Head One Tower Hamlets, presented the report detailing the Council's overall aims and objectives, the outcomes intended for people living and working in the Borough, and the actions to be taken in 2011/12 to deliver those outcomes.

The Outline Plan was accompanied by an Action Plan of key activities and milestones which had been created in line with the Mayor's priorities and following consultation with residents, third sector organisations and partner agencies.

Arising from the discussion the following points were made:

- While it was right to place the emphasis on moving the bottom up it was also important to promote higher aspirations and excellence for all
- In addition to improving the educational aspirations of young people it was also important to encourage entrepreneurship and apprenticeships which a lot of young people wanted to pursue.
- The transformation programme was citizen centred and therefore consultation with residents was crucial to the delivery of the strategy. This would also require conveying the real meaning of the strategy so it was not seen as just another example of bureaucracy.
- In monitoring the implementation of the Strategy it will be crucial for the Committee to help deliver more fully the community leadership role of councillors, particularly how they continue to drive improvement against a context of reduced resources.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

9.1 Safeguarding Adults at Risk - Report of the Scrutiny Working Group

The report was presented by Councillor Pavitt, who had acted as Chair of the working group.

She advised the Committee that the recommendations focused on the users themselves whom it was felt needed to be more involved in service planning and be part of the Safeguarding Adults Board.

The need to preserve advocacy work in the current period of public sector cuts was also acknowledged, and also given the low number of self referrals it was recommended that an independent point of contact be set up for adults who found it difficult to disclose abuse. Finally that greater training be given to adults at risk on what actually constitutes abuse so they are aware and recognise it.

Councillor Pavitt additionally took the opportunity to thank all the Council officers who contributed to undertaking the review.

After further discussion, the Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be agreed.
- (2) That the Service Head for One Tower Hamlets be authorised to amend the draft report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive Communities.

9.2 Scrutiny challenge session - Cancer - Development of Early Diagnosis and Preventative Services

Councillor Tim Archer introduced the report detailing the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on the Development of early diagnosis and preventative service held on 18 January 2011.

The session had taken place at the Mile End Hospital to enable local residents and patients to attend, and was structured to enable an exchange of information about the local approach to addressing cancer issues and an opportunity to hear stories from residents and patients about their experience of using local health services.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the recommendations contained within the report be agreed, and
- 2) That, in addition to the Cabinet, the recommendations be given to Barts and the London NHS Trust and NHS Tower Hamlets, and a written response be requested from each.

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

The Chair **Moved** and it was –

RESOLVED

That the following Section 1 pre-decision questions be submitted to Cabinet on 6 April 2011 for consideration:

8.1 Supporting People Strategy 2011-16 (CAB 106/101)

With regards to the spending on domestic violence services, could we have more information about what services are being decommissioned and the proposed replacements, and the equality impact of these changes?

10.1 Strategic Plan 2011/12: Outline Plan and year 1 Action Plan(CAB 108/101)

With targets around educational attainment being focussed on minimum standards and tackling underachievement, why are there not targets around excellence and achieving the greatest possible number of the highest grades?

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 9.30 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Ann Jackson
Overview & Scrutiny Committee