

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2012

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

Members Present:

Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair)
Councillor Rachael Saunders (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Tim Archer
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Amy Whitelock
Councillor Helal Uddin

Co-opted Members Present:

Memory Kampiyawo – (Parent Governor Representative)
Nozrul Mustafa – (Parent Governor Representative)
Canon Michael Ainsworth – (Church of England Diocese Representative)

Guests Present:

Councillor Alibor Choudhury – (Cabinet Member, Resources)
Councillor Rabina Khan – (Cabinet Member, Housing)
Chief Superintendant Dave
Stringer

Officers Present:

Andy Bamber – (Service Head Community Safety, Crime Reduction Services, Communities, Localities & Culture)
Sarah Barr – (Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer, One Tower Hamlets, Chief Executive's)
Faisal Butt – (Acting Housing Strategy and Partnerships Manager)
Alan Finch – (Interim S151 Officer, Service Head Financial Services, Risk & Accountability, Resources)
David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services (Community), Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Martin Ling – (Housing Policy Officer)
Jackie Odunoye – (Head of Strategy, Innovation & Sustainability, Development & Renewal)
Louise Russell – (Service Head Corporate Strategy and Equalities, Chief Executive's)

Louise Fleming – (Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fozul Miah.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES - TO FOLLOW

Mr Nozrul Mustafa, Co-opted Parent Governor Representative, asked that his Declaration of Interest be amended in the minutes of the last meeting. It stated that the declaration was made on the basis that he was a Parent Governor for a Bangladeshi School. Mr Mustafa advised that he was in fact an Executive Member of a Collective of Bangladeshi Schools in the Borough.

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th November 2012 be approved, subject to the above amendment to Mr Nozrul Mustafa's declaration of interest, and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

The Committee was advised that nominations had been sought for the position of Scrutiny Lead (Communities, Localities and Culture) and that Councillor Stephanie Eaton had been nominated. With no other nominations received, the Chair **Moved**, and Councillor Amy Whitelock **Seconded** the proposal; and it was:-

RESOLVED

That Councillor Stephanie Eaton be appointed to the position of Scrutiny Lead (Communities, Localities and Culture).

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

Nil items.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

7. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Scrutiny spotlight - Borough Commander (Presentation)

Chief Superintendent Dave Stringer attended the meeting and gave a detailed presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the performance in the key areas of concern in the Borough (Violence with Injury; Domestic Violence; and Anti-social Behaviour) and the challenges for the future.

The Borough Commander reported a high level of anti-social behaviour in the Borough which he was keen to work on. Work was also needed on reducing the times victims wait before reporting domestic violence. The increases shown were increases in reporting offences rather than an increase in offences committed.

Key areas of concern were also around gang violence, gun crime, knife robbery and robbery of young people and Chief Supt. Stringer spoke of the work of the family intervention team in these areas. The Police also worked closely with local schools to establish good links. There had been significant successes in the field of gang crime with a low level of gun crime, however there was much more work to be done.

Levels of burglary against older people had decreased and the Borough generally had low levels of this type of crime compared with other Boroughs. There had been an increase in violent crime between last year and this year. The Borough had high levels of violence with injury with an overall increase, but showing reductions in specific areas.

Chief Supt. Stringer advised that the Borough Police's initial response to Domestic Violence was different to every other Borough in London. He explained the arrest process and the provision of the best possible service to the victim, providing them with a named support from the start of the process. The Borough had achieved the best arrest and solving rates in the Met in a three month period. Victim satisfaction with the specialist court was high and the objective of taking the burden off the victim was being met. Despite there being much more to do, the initial signs were encouraging.

Members asked a number of questions, seeking clarification on non-molestation orders and the discrepancy in the data provided at the meeting compared to the data on the website as one showed an increase and one showed a decrease in the figures on burglary. Chief Supt. Stringer advised there had been an increase of 25% last year. In response to Members questions, he also advised that extra resources would be concentrated on tackling the high levels of anti-social behaviour in the Spitalfields and Banglatown area. Members of the Committee expressed concern that anti-social behaviour also occurred within estates and asked for assurances that this problem would be also be tackled.

Chief Supt. Stringer advised that residents were particularly concerned about anti-social behaviour and drugs in the Borough. Tower Hamlets had the second highest level of drug activity in London, the first being Westminster. Much good work had taken place to tackle the problems around Devons Road and the Aberfeldy Estate, however there was much to be done. There were issues in the Brick Lane/Whitechapel area with alcohol abuse and there was a need to focus resources. The Metropolitan Police wanted more officers in neighbourhood policing. Anti-social behaviour injunctions had been effective. More could be done to publicise the work in local neighbourhoods.

Mr Andy Bamber, Service Head Safer Communities, highlighted the work being done from the Local Authority perspective around anti-social behaviour, in particular around enforcement of noise. The Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) service had been reconfigured, with a redirected telephone number and altered working hours to enable officers to respond throughout the night. The THEOs would be linking up with Registered Social Landlords and money had been invested by the Council into additional Police officers for the Borough. There had been investment in the Dealer a Day initiative, and close work with the Probation Service and local Health services. There had also been investment in CCTV, with links being built into the CCTV systems of RSLs.

Mr Bamber advised that a drinking control zone had been introduced and the Council was working with teams around the Brick Lane/Whitechapel market area. Walkabouts had taken place and action plans produced for each Ward. A forthcoming report to Cabinet proposed a Saturation Policy for Brick Lane which would prevent any additional premises opening in the area, but would not affect existing businesses. The aim was to bring the Licensing teams of the Council and the Police together. Chief Supt. Stringer advised that he was committed to co-locating to improve service to residents.

Members welcomed the joined up approach but sought assurances that measures were in place to ensure that problems did not return when the police presence left an area. Concern was expressed about lack of communication, particularly the publicising of SNT meetings. It was felt that more could be done to make the meetings accessible. Chief Supt. Stringer informed the Committee that the aim was to work with RSLs and the community to achieve a more sustainable outcome. He highlighted the importance of the walkabouts and the involvement of the Councillors.

Chief Supt. Stringer spoke about the work around tackling vice in the Borough. More officers and effective enforcement action was needed. A working party had been established to formulate a strategy and vision statement. He hoped that a dedicated unit would be announced in due course. The Committee felt that a multi-agency approach was needed for prevention. It was noted that there was a twin track approach for enforcement and diversion.

The Chair thanked Chief Superintendent Stringer for attending the meeting and his detailed presentation.

7.2 Strategic Housing issues - Update

Councillor Rabina Khan, Cabinet Member for Housing attended the meeting and presented the report which set out the outcomes and achievements of the 2009-12 Housing Strategy; and the key areas of activity to be taken forward in response to housing issues in the Borough. Councillor Khan spoke about the Council's commitment to lifetime tenancies as part of the Tenancy Strategy. However there were some RSLs in the Borough who had indicated their preference for offering flexible tenancies to make best use of their housing stock. Councillor Khan addressed the concerns around Welfare Reform and the cap on Housing Benefit, particularly the potential impact on single vulnerable women in violent relationships. She spoke about the measures in place for dealing with problem RSLs and the under occupation of property in the Borough.

In response to Members questions, Ms Jackie Odunoye, Service Head Strategy Regeneration and Sustainability, and Councillor Khan advised that the Council was currently consulting on means testing and the application of income criteria for tenancy agreements. There would be a further dialogue when the results of the consultation were received. Focus groups had raised the issue when developing the Tenancy Strategy and it was seen as a minor issue, the primary concern being housing need.

The Committee sought clarification on measures to deal with RSLs who did not cooperate with the Council in the event that the Government continued to raise rents. Councillor Khan responded that it was hoped to have a conclusion in the following week on the issue of rent levels. It was important to work closely with RSLs; and the majority did want to work with the Council and protect residents. In this regard the Local Development Framework document would act as a safeguard.

In response to comments made by the Committee, Councillor Khan advised that work was being progressed with Partners to address the issue of underoccupation. There was a need to address the need of older residents who had links with the area. The Council was currently part of a Pan London Mobility Scheme and families who wanted to move outside the Borough were actively encouraged.

The Committee expressed concern about the impact on residents of reducing the size of their property along with a higher rent and clarification was sought on what was being done to mitigate this. Councillor Khan advised that these issues were being considered. In response to the Committee's questions she also advised that there had been a large number of requests for Right to Buy, but that it was not yet clear what the Council could do with Right to Buy receipts and guidance was awaited.

RESOLVED

1. That the outcomes and achievements of the 2009-12 Housing Strategy be noted; and
2. That the key areas of activity to be taken forward in response to housing issues in the Borough be noted.

7.3 Strategic Performance and Corporate Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Q2 2012/13

Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report which detailed the financial position of the Council at the end of Quarter 2 compared to budget, and service performance through targets. He highlighted the areas of improvement in targets and The Council had exceeded targets in homelessness prevention, smoking cessation and the rate of residential burglary. He also highlighted the areas of underperformance and the measures taken to mitigate.

Mr Alan Finch, Service Head Financial Strategy, Risk and Accountability, addressed the budget issues highlighted in the report, particularly the variances reported from the loss of housing benefit subsidy which was a result of the implementation of new software by the DWP which had affected Councils across London. There had been an underallocation of the Mayor's Education Allowance and officers were looking into the reasons why the allowance had not been taken up. There had been an underspend in the Housing Revenue Account and delays in tendering the Decent Homes contracts.

The Committee sought clarification on a discrepancy between the information under paragraph 3.5 and paragraph 5.8 of the report in respect of the Mayor's Education Allowance. Mr Finch advised that there could have been an overestimation in the demand for the service. However, Councillor Choudhury informed the Committee that the question would be taken back to the Directorate for clarification. In response to questions on the delays in tendering, Mr Finch advised that clarification would be sought from the relevant department. However he confirmed that the Council would not lose money and that the time limited money from the GLA had been spent.

In response to Members' questions regarding the risks related to the Domiciliary Care Commissioning, Mr Finch advised that they were covered by

contingencies in this financial year and were being reviewed by the department. In response to the Committee's questions relating to the Housing Benefit Subsidy, he advised that there had been a problem with debt recover, however there was provision in the homelessness reserve to mitigate.

The Committee expressed concern that the service delivery and budget for the Children Residential Family Placements Service be managed more effectively in respect of maternity leave. Mr Finch advised that he would take the comments back to the department. The Committee concluded its discussion with the view that the Council should be further progressed by this point in the financial year, but noted the advice that the variances were minor.

RESOLVED

1. That the Quarter 2 2012/13 performance be noted;
2. That the Council's financial position as detailed in sections 3 and 4 and Appendices 1-4 of the Committee report be noted; and
3. That the transfer of £808,000 from the Olympic reserve set aside to fund additional expenditure as a result of the Olympics as set out at section 3.4 and 3.6 of the Committee report be noted.

Action by

Service Head Financial Services Risk and Accountability (Alan Finch)

8. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Councillor Amy Whitelock, Scrutiny Lead for Children's Schools and Families, provided an update on the Post 16 Scrutiny Review. The discrepancy between GCSE and A Level results in the Borough would be analysed and compared to results in neighbouring boroughs. There was work to be done in the promotion of post 16 education. Views would be sought from parents on local provision and young people on their aspirations. The meetings would commence in January. Councillor Whitelock also reported that she was supporting the Mental Health and Housing Challenge Session, which would be meeting the following week. Ms Sarah Barr, Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer, advised that a number of different teams around the Council would be attending the meeting.

Councillor Ann Jackson, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, advised that the Youth Unemployment Scrutiny Review would be meeting on Thursday. The aim was to look at the issues from the point of view of the young person, in particular how better use could be made of the AMP website, the youth service's website for young people. AMP so that young people can see what route to take and what is available to them.

Councillor Rachael Saunders, Scrutiny Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing, informed the Committee that two Public Health sessions had taken place. There had been support for the Healthy Borough Programme and consideration would be given to how to support people to be healthier in their everyday work. Consideration had also been given to the way in which Public

Health would embed itself in the Local Authority. There had been a conversation with residents at St Paul's Way in respect of how local services operated and improved the lives of the local community. The aim was to reconcile the RSL and NHS language and to empower local people.

Councillor Sirajul Islam, Scrutiny Lead for Development and Renewal, advised that he had met to discuss the Localism Act and RSLs and it was hoped to meet again before Christmas. The Housing Forum was now involved in the dialogue and it was acknowledged that there needed to be a two way process to raise the bar.

RESOLVED

That the verbal updates be noted.

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

The Committee noted that questions had been submitted on the Tenancy Strategy and would be submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet on 5th of December 2012.

RESOLVED

That the pre-decision scrutiny questions be noted.

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

Canon Michael Ainsworth informed the Committee that he would be resigning his position as Co-opted Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with immediate effect due to another commitment in the Borough. However, the Church of England Diocese would be submitting another representative for consideration and appointment. He expressed his thanks to his fellow members and wished them well for the future.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Canon Ainsworth for his work with the Committee and wished him well for the future.

Action by
Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer (Sarah Barr)
Democratic Services to note.

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Nil items.

12. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

14. ANY OTHER SECTION TWO (RESTRICTED) BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 9.12 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Ann Jackson
Overview & Scrutiny Committee