

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2008

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

Members Present:

Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Waiseul Islam
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor A A Sardar

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr H Mueenuddin – Muslim Community Representative

Guests Present:

Nil

Officers Present:

Ashraf Ali – (Scrutiny Policy Officer, Equalities and Scrutiny,
Chief Executive's)
Lutfur Ali – (Assistant Chief Executive)
Suki Binjal – (Interim Head of Legal Services - Community,
Chief Executive's)
Afazul Hoque – (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny and
Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Michael Keating – (Service Head Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief
Executive's)
Chris Stephenson – Interim Joint Assistant of Human Resources
Claire Symonds – (Service Head, Customer Access)
Alan Ingram – (Democratic Services)

ELECTION OF CHAIR

Mr A. Ingram, Democratic Services Officer, opened the meeting and, in the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, requested nominations for the election of Chair for the duration of the meeting.

Councillor A.A. Sardar **moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That Councillor Ann Jackson be elected Chair of the Committee for the duration of the current meeting.

COUNCILLOR ANN JACKSON IN THE CHAIR

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair referred to the meeting of the London Scrutiny Network that would be held on 7 November 2008, including councillors from many London Boroughs, on the subject of Tower Hamlets Scrutinising Partnerships and encouraged all Members present to attend.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Abdul Asad, Bill Turner and Joshua Peck.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

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 Cabinet held on 8 October 2008.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT: LEAD MEMBER

Councillor Sirajul Islam, Deputy Leader of the Council, gave a presentation on the key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from his broad portfolio. He tabled additional information for those present at the meeting.

The Committee noted details of Councillor Sirajul Islam’s work in connection with the Burial Subsidy Scheme; the Equalities Standard for Local Government (in connection with which the Council was recognised nationally as an example of good practice, being one of only six authorities nationally at the top level); prevention of terrorism and homophobic hate; promotion of opportunity for BME staff; encouragement of women into public life as councillors; black history month and local democracy week; the Young Mayor and One Tower Hamlets.

Members then addressed questions to the Deputy Leader, who responded accordingly relating to a workforce reflecting the community; services provided for backbench Members; programme for future councillors; the possible inclusion of cremation costs in the Burial Subsidy Scheme; targeting recruitment to all sectors of the community; budget consultations with the public; outbasing of committee meetings into community facilities; the role of Members around equalities, faith and sexual orientation issues; greater public involvement around planning issues.

Mr Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive, undertook to provide the Committee with details of how it was envisaged that future councillors would be recruited, how many of the latest intake of recruits were from the BME community and whether it would be possible to ensure that advertisements were directed to such facilities as Jagonari and St Hilda’s Centre to access hard-to-reach communities.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sirajul Islam for a comprehensive and open presentation.

8. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Corporate Complaints - Half Year Report

Ms Claire Symonds, Service Head Customer Access, introduced a report providing a summary of complaints completed by the Council in the period 1 April 2008 to 31 September 2008, through the Corporate Complaints Procedure, Social Services Complaints and those received and determined by the Local Government Ombudsman. She added that the focus on Stage 1

complaints over that period had resulted in an adverse effect on Stage 2 and 3 response times, however measures were no in place to address this. Social Care complaints were lower in volume than many other local authorities and there had been no findings of maladministration by the Ombudsman.

Ms Symonds then responded to questions put by Members concerning Ombudsman procedures for initial complaints; publicity for the Council's Complaints Procedure and related use of the website; high level of parking complaints; accessibility of newer communities and the BME population to the complaints system; quality control measures for complaints correspondence.

With regard to particular concerns raised, Ms Symonds undertook to look into:

- the numbers of complaints arising from the Education Admission Appeals system;
- monitoring of complaints made to Registered Social Landlords;
- analysis of complaints by ethnicity;
- distribution of complaints leaflets at LAP meetings to improve publicity.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

9. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

9.1 VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Councillor Shiria Khatun (A Safe and Supportive Community) indicated that there had been two sessions for the alcohol misuse amongst young people review (entitled *Smashed*). These had looked at the strategy and policy drivers in place to deal with the enforcement and preventative measures in place in the Borough to deter young people from misusing alcohol. The next session would be held on 25 November and would focus on the health, education and crime elements of alcohol misuse. A focus session with parents was also being arranged and Councillor Khatun would be attending the alcohol violence group in late November.

Councillor A.A. Sardar (A Prosperous Community) stated that he had conducted a focus session with the Service Head, Early Years Children & Learning to look at policy frameworks. The next session would be on 24 November to consider ways of engaging parents and appropriate early intervention.

Councillor Waiseul Islam (A Great Place to Live) reported that he was reviewing affordable home ownership and had agreed a draft scoping document to examine access for local residents to home ownership. He had been working with Tower Hamlets Community Housing and Tower Hamlets Housing Forum to secure their participation and was also planning

discussions with developers on how they could help with policy shaping. The first review meeting was scheduled for 26 November and there would be a site visit to Bow Locks in December on the subject of the Community Land Trust model for development.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton (A Healthy Community) commented that the Health Scrutiny Panel would be undertaking a review on end-of-life issues and Councillor Bill Turner would be approaching faith leaders to progress work on organ donorship.

Councillor Ann Jackson (One Tower Hamlets) stated that the first review session had focused on councillors taking community leadership roles with regard to child poverty, etc., and following development of a map identifying areas of poverty within the Borough, it was proposed to discuss with relevant bodies such as the Single Parent focus group to exchange experiences relating to life in poverty. The Jobcentre Plus would be asked about the services they could offer residents and the Learning Skills Council and Skillsmatch would be approached with a view to removing barriers and helping people into work. A Women's Focus Group would be held on 19 November and details would be distributed on the identification of areas of poverty for each LAP area.

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

Councillor Waiseul Islam asked that it be noted that the question relating to Item 10.3 below related to matters affecting his Ward.

The Chair **moved** and it was **RESOLVED**

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

Agenda Item 7.1 – Children's Services Capital Programme (CAB 063/089)

Given the large capital investment in Toby Lane, what is the Council doing to publicise our commitment to decent meals and have we considered whether we can seek external funding for this service as it helps reduce cardiovascular disease and obesity?

Agenda Item 10.1 – Baishaki Mela Options 2009 (CAB 065/089)

Will the Cabinet consider creating a more community led festival linked to the Local Area Partnerships which encourages greater participation, this could also include funding from the LAP for the festival?

Agenda Item 10.2 – Award of Corporate Catering Contract (CAB 066/089)

In reference to paragraph 4.5 will the Cabinet consider re-negotiating with the Contractor to ensure they fully commit to specified targets for London Living Wage from the beginning of the contract?

Agenda Item 10.3 – Disposal of Grenfell School Site, now known as the Madani School, Myrdle Street, E1 (CAB 067/089)

- (1) As this school takes pupils from Hackney and Newham, has the Cabinet considered seeking contributions from these Boroughs?
- (2) Given the school's intention to become a mainstream Voluntary Aided School within the borough, has the Council consulted LGA and or Ofsted on the best way to proceed with this disposal?

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

No urgent business was submitted.

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No Section Two business was submitted.

13. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section Two reports "called in" from the meeting of Cabinet held on 8 October 2008.

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

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

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

No Section Two urgent business was submitted.

The meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.

Councillor Abdul Asad
Chair
Overview & Scrutiny Committee