

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 13 JANUARY 2009

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

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Asad (Chair)
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Abjol Miah
Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor David Snowdon
Councillor Bill Turner (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Lutfa Begum (In place of Councillor Shiria Khatun)
Councillor Peter Golds (In place of Councillor Ahmed Hussain)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Clair Hawkins – Lead Member Children’s Services

Officers Present:

Lutfur Ali	– (Assistant Chief Executive)
Suki Binjal	– (Interim Head of Legal Services - Community, Chief Executive's)
Kevan Collins	– (Corporate Director, Children's Services)
Afazul Hoque	– (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny and Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Michael Keating	– (Service Head Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Amanda Thompson	– (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. SUKI BINJAL - LEGAL ADVISOR TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair, Councillor Abdul Asad, informed the Committee that this was the last meeting that would be supported by Suki as she would shortly be leaving the Council.

On behalf of the Committee, he thanked Suki for all her hard work and support and wished her well for the future.

2. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chair reported that Councillors David Snowden and Ahmed Hussain had recently been appointed to the Committee, and he welcomed Councillor Snowden who was present to his first meeting.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed Hussain, Waiseul Islam, Ann Jackson and Shiria Khatun.

Councillors Peter Golds and Lutfa Begum were present as substitutes for Councillors Hussain and Khatun.

Councillor Sirajul Islam, Deputy Leader of the Council, also presented his apologies as he had been expected to attend the meeting and present agenda item 8.1 – Diversity and Equality Action Plan 2008/2009.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2008 be agreed as a correct record.

6. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None.

7. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

Suki Binjal, Interim Legal Services Manager, informed Members that a representative from the Disability Coalition was present at the meeting and wished to make a deputation in relation to agenda item 8.1 – Diversity and Equality Action Plan 2008/2009. The representative had advised her that she had only very recently been sent a copy of the meeting agenda and therefore had not submitted her request before the deadline.

Ms Binjal stated that in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules at Part 4.1 of the Council's Constitution (Rule 20.1), the deadline for receipt of

deputation requests had passed, however it was open to the Committee to consider whether to suspend the rule to enable the deputation to address the Committee.

The Committee agreed that Council Procedure Rule 20.1 be suspended in order to allow the Committee to consider whether or not to hear the deputation. This motion was put to the meeting and was agreed.

Following discussion the committee voted on whether to hear the deputation and agreed that it would do so. It was further agreed that this should be done immediately prior to consideration of the relevant agenda item.

8. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section One reports 'called in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 3 December 2008.

9. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT - LEAD MEMBER

Councillor Clair Hawkins, Lead Member for Children's Services, gave a presentation on the key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from her portfolio.

She informed the Committee that 41% of secondary school students were achieving 5 A* - C GCSEs, including English and Maths, which was closing the gap towards the national average of 47%. The Borough's 11 year olds were currently outperforming the national average in Maths, and the lowest ever levels of NEETS (not in education, employment or training) had been recorded. She further informed the Committee about the outstanding 'JAR' and APA judgements which had given top marks in all the service areas assessed, as well as the Council attaining Beacon status for reducing reoffending.

Councillor Hawkins went on to highlight the key priorities of Children's Services. These included tackling child poverty, ensuring a stronger engagement with parents and support for families - with a focus on early intervention; the building of community participation, engagement and cohesion through access to youth services, cultural activities and leisure opportunities.

Councillor Hawkins ended her presentation by highlighting the key targets for the coming year, which included reducing the proportion of children in child poverty by 43.5%, and reducing obesity among primary school age children in Year 6 by 23.6%.

In response to questions Councillor Hawkins advised that an additional one million pounds had been allocated to Youth Service over the next two years in order to fund increased working hours to make the service more accessible to

young people. This would also help enable early intervention for those at risk of offending.

Currently the targets for reducing child obesity were not particularly stretching as it was necessary to actually curb the rise of obesity before attempting to reduce it.

Agency staff were vital to the functioning of Children's Services as it was so difficult to recruit permanent staff, and also the number of children requiring help was continuing to rise. However, she assured Members that work was on-going to recruit staff on a permanent basis.

The 'Building Schools for the Future' programme was making good progress and had already made a huge impact on children and families.

A number of the LAA targets had been deferred as the Government had not yet set a benchmark for these.

School attendance had improved although work was still needed to focus on extended holidays taken during term time and children who were persistently absent. A few schools had also started closing for Eid and others were being encouraged to do the same in order to reduce the number of 'absentees' on this day.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hawkins for her attendance and for her responses to the questions raised by members of the Committee.

10. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

10.1 Diversity and Equality Action Plan 2008/2009 - Six Monthly Monitoring Report

The Chair welcomed the deputation and asked its representative to address the meeting.

Angela Stanworth addressed the meeting on behalf of the Disability Coalition, and advised that she wished her comments to be regarded by the Committee as those of a 'critical friend'. She stated that around 20% of the residents of Tower Hamlets were disabled in very different ways, and the Council needed to ensure that it was not excluding any particular group or disability.

The role of the Disability Coalition was to ensure that disabled people were able to function as full citizens, as unfortunately this was not always the case. There was a need for the Council to engage with organisations like these, and ensure that the outcomes of its reviews were implemented. An ongoing issue had been the lack of disabled parking at the Council's Ideas stores.

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions in relation to the type of problems faced by Tower Hamlets' disabled residents particularly, preferred methods of engagement, and working in partnership.

The Chair thanked Ms Stanworth for her attendance and presentation to the meeting.

Michael Keating, Head of Scrutiny and Equalities, after outlining how the Council has worked with the Disability Coalition and other third sector groups, advised that the Council was currently establishing a Pan Disability Panel. This will consist of 2/300 residents and will be used to consult people with disabilities. As well as consultation on broad questions there will also be specific focus groups established when required to deal with particular issues. Mr Keating also described the successful events for Bengali Disability Awareness Day and the International Day of the Disabled, both supported by the Council, which had taken place in recent months.

Mr Keating then introduced the six monthly monitoring report of the Council's Diversity and Equality Action Plan for 2008/9 which demonstrated that at six months, 76% of all milestones within the Plan had been met or were on target to be met within fixed timescales. This represented significant progress in a number of areas

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

11. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

11.1 Acute Stroke and Major Trauma - Establishment of Pan London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Michael Keating, Head of Scrutiny and Equalities, introduced the report stating that the Committee had been asked to agree that Tower Hamlets participate and nominate a representative and a deputy to the Acute Stroke and Major Trauma Pan London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED

That Tower Hamlets participate and that Councillor Stephanie Eaton be appointed to the Acute Stroke and Major Trauma Pan London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Lutfa Begum be her Deputy.

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

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

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

No Section One urgent business was submitted.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No Section Two business was submitted.

15. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no Section Two reports 'called-in' from the meeting of Cabinet held on 3 December 2008.

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

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

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

No Section Two urgent business was submitted.

The meeting finished at 8.45p.m

Councillor Abdul Asad, Chair