

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2018**

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

**Members Present:**

Councillor Dave Chesterton (Chair)

Councillor Clare Harrisson (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Danny Hassell

Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim

Councillor Ayas Miah

Councillor Helal Uddin

Councillor Andrew Wood

Scrutiny Lead for Scrutiny Lead for  
Health, Adults & Community

Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services

Scrutiny Lead for Governance

Scrutiny Lead for Place

Scrutiny Lead for Resources

**Co-opted Members Present:**

Shabbir Chowdhury

Fatiha Kassouri

Dr Phillip Rice

Christine Trumper

Parent Governors

Parent Governors

Church of England Representative

Parent Governors

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs

Councillor David Edgar

**Apologies:**

Joanna Hannan

Representative of Diocese of  
Westminster

**In attendance:**

Elizabeth Bailey

Senior Strategy, Policy and  
Performance Officer

Debbie Barnes

Executive Director, Children's Services -  
Lincolnshire County Council

Debbie Jones

Afazul Hoque

Corporate Director, Children's  
Interim Service Manager, Strategy,  
Policy & Performance

Brian Snary

Financial Accountant - Resources

Will Tuckley  
Alan Wood  
David Knight

Chief Executive  
Chair, Children's Improvement Board  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

## **1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST**

There were no declarations on pecuniary interest

## **2. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

### **2.1 Children's Services Improvement Programme, Quarterly Progress Report (Quarter 3)**

The Committee received an update on progress in delivering improvements to Children's Services in response to the report by Ofsted in 2017 which had rated the Council's services 'inadequate'. The Council's improvement plan it was noted aims to achieve a standard of at least 'good' by April 2019, which is the minimum that the Borough's children and families expect.

The report indicated that the Council has now had two monitoring visits from Ofsted. In their letter reporting findings from the most recent of these visits in December 2017, Ofsted noted that improvements have been made and sustained within Children's Services and that leaders and managers now showed increased in-depth knowledge of strengths and areas of weakness. In particular, the way the Council assesses referrals of children and families for social care support had been identified as being timely and thresholds for help were appropriately applied, meaning that no children in the cases they sampled were at risk of immediate harm. The letter also pointed to some areas needing further improvement and we are continuing our focus on these areas through our improvement plan.

The body of this report also included commentary on progress in the four themes of the Council's improvement plan at the end of the third quarter of the improvement programme.

In addition, it was noted that whilst the Council are making progress in embedding the changes that have been made in the first 9 months of the improvement programme, giving Tower Hamlets a firm foundation for improvement, there does remain significant challenges to ensuring that the service improves to meet a 'good' inspection standard and sustains this improvement. Finally, the Committee were informed that the focus in the next stage will be to build on the progress made so that further improvement is achieved and sustained. The questions arising from the discussions on this agenda may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the focus of tonight's meeting would be to hear from two of the Council's service improvement partners (i) Debbie Barnes, Executive Director, Children's Services - Lincolnshire County Council

and (ii) Sir Alan Wood - Chair, Children's Improvement Board) and to challenge them on the journey that they have been on with Tower Hamlets;

- Was reminded that tonight as with previous discussions at Scrutiny on the Children's Services Improvement Programme would aim to maintain the transparency with the public through the process;
- Noted with interest that both the DfE and Ofsted have been very positive on the progress although there is still a long way to go;
- Noted need for Tower Hamlets to have a cadre of highly qualified and skilled staff to take this forward and that is an issue that will need to be the focus of regular scrutiny going forward;
- Noted that as part of embedding of Quality Assurance at all levels, Ofsted have recommended that the Council take forward a "Practice Week", where senior leaders spend time with frontline social workers reviewing cases and shadowing their work with children and families in order to better understand their day to day experience. It was noted that "Practice Week" had taken place over a three day period between 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2017 with senior officers including the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services taking part, alongside the Mayor, the Lead Member for Children's Services and Lead Overview and Scrutiny Member for Children's Services, the Divisional Director and the Chair of the Local Safe Guarding Children's Board. Observations of practice had included meeting student social workers, spending time with social work teams and observing professional meetings about children. Frustrations with the IT infrastructure had been observed as well as concerns around caseloads, personal development / training and the approach to compliance and communication. These observations it was noted are informing the improvement activity going forward;
- Noted that (i) the Service has achieved compliance with statutory guidance; (ii) that needs a stable and qualified workforce to deliver these changes and (iii) that there needs to be a strong and effective partnerships between schools; health; police and third sector especially in respect of "early help". However, there needs to be regular and robust scrutiny of these areas and the Children's Services Improvement Programme needs to form part of the councillor induction programme;
- Noted that the biggest potential risk to progress is the work force and the scrutiny role going forward needs to be the monitoring recruitment retention Noted that Scrutiny needs to see that the Council understands the quality of the employment offer **i.e.** career development; management of staff caseloads; the development of managers as part of the professional offer; Scrutiny needs to identify and scrutinise **e.g.** those providing the universal services need to understand the new offer that is now being made; how deeply understood is that offer be they doctors; teachers or police especially with regards to the new thresholds and how many children are there without plans;

- Noted that the training for Councillors in Tower Hamlets on the Children's Services Improvement Programme is very good and needs to be rolled out again for new Councillors;
- Noted that the Council is in the middle of a period of change and that staff feel that their managers are interested in the support and development of their officers;
- Noted that frontline management is now more in tune with central management and their staff;
- Noted that the performance surgeries are having a positive impact and staff feel now that they have manageable caseloads and can speak to managers about their workloads and their safety on a day to day basis;
- Noted that staff know how to engage with family and their networks;
- Noted that staff know their managers consider them to be an asset;
- Noted that both staff and managers now own the process which is a corporately supported bespoke process;
- Noted that staff consider that both councillors; the corporate leadership and their managers are more visible than before and the staff turnover has slowed and the teams feel that there is increased stability. Also managers feel that their senior management are there to support them; manage the risk and officers are more supportive of each other and other teams i.e. That there is now a real sense of energy from staff but there is still a need to be mindful of staff wellbeing;
- Noted that the level of corporate attention to addressing this issue is of a very high standard;
- Noted that those staff in the relevant teams feel that they actually have ownership of the approach and the level and pace of change;
- Was keen to ensure the sustainability of this process in a high risk service;
- Wanted to see evidence that the parents and their families understand the development of the process that is there to help them.
- Wished to see a very positive and productive way the offer of support is communicated to the parents and families;
- Noted that the social work force should reflect the community that it seeks to serve (culturally sensitive) and there is engagement across the community about developing this programme;
- Agreed that early help and support is available is fundamental and that it is seen as genuine support which will mean that there is a greater the chance of there being positive outcomes; and
- Noted that Tower Hamlets is now spending £16m on improving the reliability and prioritising Children's and Social Care IT infrastructure.

In conclusion, the Councillor Whitelock Gibbs the Cabinet Member for Children's Services place on record her thanks to the Committee for all their help and support and stated that it had been a pleasure to attend scrutiny meetings and to receive the thoughtful and considered views from across the political spectrum. In response, the Chair Councillor Chesterton thanked Councillor Whitelock Gibbs for what she has done is taking scrutiny through her portfolio in an open and positive manner.

## **2.2 Chief Executive**

The Committee received and noted a presentation from Mr Will Tuckley the Council's Chief Executive which outlined the vision for Tower Hamlets and looked at the key complement's for how Tower Hamlets will deliver the wider aspirations of residents. Following the presentation there was a full and wide ranging discussion which may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the 2018 Local Government will be an opportunity for Tower Hamlets to illustrate that it can deliver a fair and appropriate electoral process that facilitates access whilst minimising corruption. In response to comments from the Committee it was noted that Tower Hamlets has done everything possible to minimise any opportunities for corruption and malpractice;
- Noted that the Council are working hard to address those concerns raised in regard to a perceived "silo mentality" in some areas of the authority and that there is a need to work together as a Council and to accept collective responsibility in addressing that issue;
- Welcomed the recognition of the importance of the visibility of management across the Council;
- Noted that managers are expected to deal with issues that arise and that the Council needs to support its managers so that they can learn and move forward;
- Commented that it would wish to see the findings of the Staff Survey and address those issues where officers consider they do not get the support that they need and to also understand the needs and aspirations of local residents;
- Were pleased to note that the Council is growing in confidence in understanding the concerns and aspirations of staff and residents;
- Noted with regards to staff the IIP report it is encouraging in that staff have a pride in their organisation; and
- Noted that it is part of the role of a Chief Executive to encourage staff to follow him on such a journey of change.

## **3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

Item deferred

## **4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS**

Nil items

**5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG  
2016/17**

**\*\*Ward Walkabouts\*\***

Noted that local councillors had expressed concerns regarding the frequency and the scheduling of Ward Walkabouts.

**\*\*Accident and Emergency\*\***

Noted that there was an issue regarding incidence of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Accident and Emergency Units in Tower Hamlets. It was felt that this would potentially benefit from careful consideration by the relevant Scrutiny Sub-Committee e.g. MOPAC has funded police officers to be stationed in A&E Units and it would be helpful for the Sub-Committee to have details of these officers.

**6. CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Committee received and noted the recent Scrutiny Report produced by the DCLG and indicated that this report should be given full consideration at the first meeting in the New Municipal Year. Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

**RESOLVED**

To formally request that the Executive to provide a response to the Committee on the DCLG Report and that this formal response should be provided to the first meeting after the May Elections.

**7. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items

**8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

**8.1 Q3 Corporate Budget Monitoring Report**

The Committee received and noted a report that indicated in February 2017 the Council had agreed a General Fund (GF) revenue budget of £338.9m and a Capital programme of £216.2m (GF £103.1m, £113.1m Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2017-18). This report details the projected outturn position for 2017-18 based on information as at the end of Period 9 (December 2017). The report includes details of (i) General Fund (GF); Revenue Budget Position (ii) Housing Revenue Account (HRA); (iii) Budget Position; (iv) Progress delivering 2017-18 Savings (v) Progress delivering Council Growth Priorities, including Mayoral Priority Growth (vi) Council Tax and Business Rates Income (vii) Treasury Management Activities and (viii) Pension Fund Investments Position. The questions arising from the discussions on this agenda item may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Welcomed the new format for the report;
- Asked that they be provided with clarification on the reason for the £0.4m underspend in Substance Misuse Services? Accordingly it was agreed to add this question to the list for submission to the next Cabinet on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2018;
- Noted that with regard to the Pension Fund the overall fund value has increased by £99m £1,489bn;
- Was informed that the £10.5m spend in Children's Services is a result of the spending needed after Ofsted;
- Was pleased to note that every child eligible for Free School Meals would now have to register;
- Wanted to know if the Housing Community Benefit Society is likely to work with the Council on acquisitions of affordable housing during 2018/19. It was therefore agreed to add this question to the list for submission to the next Cabinet on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2018; and
- Asked if the £190m in Affordable Housing had been spent since it was last considered at Scrutiny in December? It agreed to add this question to the list for submission to the next Cabinet on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

## **9. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

### **Councillor Clare Harrisson - Scrutiny Lead for Health, Adults & Community**

Noted details regarding the initial scrutiny session on the provision of health services for homeless persons in all its different forms and that the second session would involve statutory partners such as St. Mungo's.

### **Councillor Danny Hassell - Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services**

Noted that the report of the Youth Services Review would be presented to the committee on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, 2018 and Councillor Hassell would be involved in the front line review which is part of the preparation process for Ofsted.

### **Councillor Ayas Miah Scrutiny Lead for Governance**

Noted the update on the Brexit Scrutiny Review would be presented to the committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2018.

### **Councillor Helal Uddin - Scrutiny Lead for Place**

Noted the update on the Housing Services Review on Fire Safety and expressed concern at the poor level of attendance at this challenge session.

**Councillor Andrew Wood - Scrutiny Lead for Resources**

Received and noted an update on the Scrutiny Grants Committee including the recent review on access to and the use of open space.

**10. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**

The Committee was asked to have any pre-decision scrutiny questions submitted to Democratic Services by 12:00 noon on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2018.

**11. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**

Nil items

**12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The agenda circulated contained no exempt/ confidential business and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

**13. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

Nil items

**14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items

**15. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS**

Nil items

**16. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil items

**The meeting ended at 9.30 p.m.**

**Chair, Councillor Dave Chesterton  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**