

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 28 JULY 2009

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

Members Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam (Chair)
Councillor Bill Turner (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Alexander Heslop
Councillor Ann Jackson
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor A A Sardar
Councillor David Snowdon

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Tim Archer

Officers Present:

Lutfur Ali	– (Assistant Chief Executive)
Michael Keating	– (Service Head, Scrutiny & Equalities)
Afazul Hoque	– (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Mohammed Ahad	– (Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Barry Clark	– (Administrative Support Officer Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
Kevan Collins	– (Interim Chief Executive)
Stephanie Ford	– (Interim Performance Manager, Strategy & Performance, Chief Executive's)
Isabella Freeman	– (Assistant Chief Executive [Legal Services])
Chris Naylor	– (Corporate Director, Resources)
Chris Worby	– (Service Head, Housing Regeneration, Development & Renewal)
Louise Fleming	– (Senior Committee Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from co-opted members Mr Abdur Rouf and Mr H Mueenuddin.

The Chair announced that he would convene a Scrutiny Challenge session on the topic of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) cuts at TH College in response to Councillor Bill Turner's proposal at full Council.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Alex Heslop and Councillor Denise Jones declared personal interests in item 6.1 which related to the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project as they were both members of the Board of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Councillor Bill Turner declared a personal interest in item 9.1 which related to Social Care Complaints as he was employed as a social care worker.

Councillor Md. Shahid Ali declared a personal interest in item 6.1 which related to the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project as a former resident of Robin Hood Gardens.

Councillor Denise Jones declared a personal interest in item 10.2 which related to the establishment of an Inner North East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a non-executive member of NHS Tower Hamlets.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

There were no requests made to submit petitions at the meeting.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

5.1 Deputation by Mr Darren Pauling in respect of the Called-in decision relating to the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project

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

Mr Darren Pauling, a resident of Robin Hood Gardens, addressed the meeting in relation to the regeneration proposals for the Blackwell Reach area. He spoke in objection on the grounds that there were residents who would like the estate to be refurbished rather than demolished. He outlined the concerns of the residents relating to the proposed decant and felt there should be a full public meeting to air the concerns of residents.

The Chair thanked the deputation for attending the meeting.

5.2 Deputation by Mr Siraj Salekin in respect of the Called-in decision relating to the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project

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

Mr Siraj Salekin, supported by Mr Gulam Rabbani, Mr Shofiquil Haque and Mr Jubenyer from the Robin Hood Gardens TRA, addressed the meeting in relation to the regeneration proposals for the Blackwell Reach area. He outlined the current problems with anti-social behaviour on the estate and supported the regeneration for the delivery of housing and improvement of living conditions.

The Chair thanked the deputation for attending the meeting.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

6.1 Report Called-In - Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project

The Chair outlined the call-in procedure to the Committee.

Councillor Archer for the Call-In Members referred to the reasons in their requisition and highlighted the main issues that they held with the provisionally agreed decisions in respect of the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project.

Councillor Archer outlined the reasons for the Call-in, namely that time had been lost in waiting for the decision of the Secretary of State, in which time the economic climate had changed thus affecting the viability of the scheme. Therefore the revised baseline capacity for 1,600 new homes was a reduction of 1,400 since the original consultation. There were concerns about the level of affordable housing and the upheaval that would be caused to residents. He highlighted concerns of residents relating to the loss of their existing rights of tenure and felt that existing residents should be offered like for like properties in the rebuilt estate.

Councillor Archer then responded to questions from the Committee, in particular in relation to his consultation with the residents. He advised that he

had previously written to the Secretary of State to request that he speed up the decision. He supported the demolition of the estate. However, he was aware of residents' concerns relating to tenancy security.

Councillor Marc Francis, Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration, on behalf of the Cabinet in response to the Call-in, tabled pictures showing examples of the state of disrepair on the estate and stated that the housing needs of residents could not be ignored. He quoted comments made by the Call-in Councillors at previous meetings in support of the regeneration of the area and outlined the benefits of the scheme.

Councillor Tim Archer responded to Cllr Francis's representation, reiterating that he supported the demolition of the estate but that he was aware of residents' concerns relating to tenancy security.

Committee Members then put detailed questions to Councillor Francis on a number of issues including the Council's current policy in relation to assured tenancies, the effect of the current economic problems on the scheme, the consultation undertaken and the process for decant.

After the departure of the Cabinet Members, the Committee expressed concern that existing residents would be moving into smaller properties following the demolition. However, it was felt that there had already been delays and that the residents needed some decisive action to take place. It was felt that consultation regarding the decant should take place.

Following the discussion the Committee voted on whether to refer the item back to the Cabinet for further consideration and it was

RESOLVED:

That the alternative course of action proposed in the Call-in not be pursued and the decision of the Cabinet be confirmed. The Cabinet is asked to note the comments made relating to residents' concerns surrounding the decant and the assured tenancies.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Lead Member for Resources and Performance, gave a presentation on the key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from his portfolio.

The Lead Member stated the main aims of the Resources Directorate were: Efficiency and value for money; Improving Customer Service; Workforce Development; and Information and Communications Technology. He outlined the successes and challenges faced by the Council's Corporate Property service. A key role for Strategy and Performance would be the co-ordination of the Council's response to the Government's performance framework for local government. The Lead Member summarised the feedback from the

Audit Commission on the Council's direction of travel and the results of the Residents' and Staff Surveys.

The Committee asked a number of questions relating to Workforce to Reflect the Community, in particular workers with learning disabilities, Area Based Grants, One Stop Shops, the timetable for the reduction of agency staff, the lessons learnt over participatory budgeting and the use of the Right to Buy receipts. The Lead Member and the Corporate Director Resources responded to Members' questions and advised that the points raised would be investigated. It was suggested that the individual Committee members' questions be recorded with the responses reported back to the next meeting in the form of an Action Note. The Chair advised that he would consider the request with officers and thanked the Lead Member Resources and Performance and the Corporate Director Resources for their presentation.

8. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ISSUES

8.1 Financial Outlook

The Committee noted that the country had entered a recession and Public finances were severely in deficit and growth in public spending would need to be curtailed from the levels experienced over recent years in order to bring them back into balance. The Committee sought reassurances from the Lead Member that in this instance the Council's budget would be managed carefully to reduce the potential impact on our residents.

The Committee sought assurances that, in having a single budget process for the General Fund and HRA for 2010/11, they would be presented separately for Members to scrutinise the different accounts.

The Committee asked that further assurances be sought regarding the reduction in committed bid for Learning Disabilities Commissioning in 2012/13 by £200k. The Committee in particular wanted actual agreement rather than an assumption that this £200k will be offset by the PCT continuing care income.

Overview and Scrutiny Members recognised that this was the first part of their scrutiny of the budget process and looked forward to further more detailed discussions as part of the Council budget setting process. The Committee also welcomed the assurance from the Lead Member on the involvement of the third sector and voluntary agencies in the budget consultation process.

9. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

9.1 Corporate Complaints and Social Care Complaints - Annual Report

Councillor Joshua Peck, Deputy Leader of the Council, presented a report containing a summary of the complaints received by the Council in the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

The Committee noted the content of the report.

9.2 Performance and Finance Annual Report 2008-09

Councillor Ohid Ahmed, Lead Member for Resources and Performance, presented the Council's combined annual service and financial performance report, which covered the authority's progress against the actions in the Strategic Plan, Strategic Priority Indicators and its financial position for year end 2008/09.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the performance information contained in the report.

10. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

10.1 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/10

Michael Keating, Service Head Scrutiny and Equalities, presented a report which outlined the Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2009/10 municipal year and the proposals for implementing a pilot for the Councillor Call for Action.

Members expressed some concern that the Councillor Call for Action process could be drawn out and restrictive. However the principle was supported as it was seen as a good way for backbench Members to become more involved in the democratic process. The pilot should be promoted to residents in a constructive and open way.

The Committee proposed that the LAP Steering Group Terms of Reference should be examined in order to increase the engagement with the scrutiny process. Members also proposed that the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the 5 Borough Olympic Joint Committee should also be considered.

10.2 Establishment of Inner North East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED

1. That the Council participate in the proposed Inner London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) established to respond to the consultation document issued by the Joint Committee of PCTs on proposed changes to NHS acute services.
2. That Councillors Sirajul Islam, Ann Jackson and Tim Archer be appointed to represent the authority of the Inner London JOSC.
3. That Councillor Dr Emma Jones and two other Majority Group members be appointed as deputies for the above members, to be confirmed following discussions with the Majority Group.
4. That the Service Head Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree the detailed terms of reference for how JOSC will operate in consultation with the appointed Members.

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

RESOLVED

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

Agenda Item 6.1 Ideas Stores Strategy (CAB 018/090)

1. What work has been done on developing the core offerings of the Idea Stores for example the book collection? How does our performance on the number of visits, book borrowing and other key performance indicators compare with peer Boroughs?

Agenda Item 6.2 Council's Lettings Policy (CAB 019/090)

1. The Scrutiny Review into the Council's Lettings Policy recommended that the Council consider joining the East London Lettings Company, following the completion of a full feasibility study and consultation with the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum. Has the Feasibility Study taken place? If so, what were the outcomes? Could the Council make any efficiency savings if they were to join ELLC?
2. In Para 4.21 there is an acknowledgement that the new Lettings Policy would lead to a rise in persons in temporary accommodation. Has any estimate been made of the cost of this, and whether this would have an adverse affect on any of our core performance indicators?

3. Will the Council undertake an equalities impact assessment on the sons and daughters policy? What would be the likely demographic impact of renewing this policy and how would this affect people from less well off groups?
4. What would be the effect on the large number of people currently in CG3 who would be moved into the new group 5, simply as their parents are not from Tower Hamlets?

Agenda Item 6.4 Adoption of Street and Building Naming and Numbering Policy, Regulations and Guidelines (CAB 021/090)

1. Under section 3.3.1 of the proposed new policy could the Council consider renaming Osborn Street as Brick Lane?

Agenda Item 6.5 Proposed Acquisition of Leasehold Interest at 585-593 Commercial Road, E1 and Temporary Relocation of Leven Road Car Pound (CAB 022/090)

1. Can the Cabinet clarify how long the temporary use of 585-593 Commercial Rd will be for?
2. Will the revenue cost of running a car pound from Commercial Rd be contained within the directorates existing budget?
3. Will running a car pound from a busy high street location cause any traffic congestion and if so how will this be mitigated?

Agenda Item 6.6 Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009/10 (CAB 023/090)

1. What consideration has the Council given to publishing food hygiene ratings online or publicly as is the case in some local authorities?

Agenda Item 7.3 Establishing a National Challenge Trust School at St Paul's Way Community School (CAB 026/090)

1. Can the Cabinet ensure that the school's admission and appeals policies are consistent with the other schools in the borough as this is an issue a number of constituents have raised with councillors?

Agenda Item 10.4 Five Boroughs Olympic Joint Committee (CAB 032/090)

1. Can the Cabinet outline what provisions there are for publication and reporting back decisions of the Joint Committee?
2. With reference to paragraph 4.20, does the Cabinet feel a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee which considers the decisions of the

Joint Committee and undertakes regular scrutiny work in relation to the Olympics would be useful?

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

None.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That, under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of the Section Two business on the grounds that it contains information defined as Exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.

14. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

14.1 Report Called-In - Consideration of Individual Case for Severance

The Committee considered a Called-in report on the consideration of individual case for severance, in accordance with the Council's Call-in procedure, and made recommendations accordingly.

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

None.

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

None.