

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE TOWER HAMLETS BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT BOARD

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2018

ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, LONDON E14 2BG

Members Present:

Mayor John Biggs (Chair)	(Executive Mayor)
Sir Steve Bullock	(External Representative - THBVIB)
Alan Finch	(Local Government Association)
Sir Alan Wood	(Chair, Children's Improvement Board)
Will Tuckley	(Chief Executive)
Sharon Godman	(Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Partnerships)
Councillor Sirajul Islam	(Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing)
Councillor David Edgar	(Cabinet Member for Resources)
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs	(Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services)
Councillor Dave Chesterton	(Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Officers Present:

Zena Cooke	–	(Corporate Director, Resources)
Adrian Gorst	–	(Divisional Director, IT)
Asmat Hussain	–	(Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer)
Paul Greeno	–	(Senior Corporate and Governance Legal Officer, Legal Services)
Debbie Jones	–	(Corporate Director, Children's Services)
William Tompsett	–	(Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer)
Antonella Burgio	–	(Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for lateness was received on behalf of Councillor Whitelock-Gibbs.

Councillors Edgar and Islam each submitted an apology for leaving early.

The Board also noted an apology for lateness from Debbie Jones, Corporate Director for Children's Services.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were deferred.

VARY ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair moved and it was agreed that the order of business be varied. The business of the meeting was discussed in the following order: Item, 5, 6, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10. For ease of reference the minutes are printed in the published agenda order.

4. BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2017-18 -YEAR END REPORT

The Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer presented the report which informed the Board of progress against the delivery of the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18. The Board noted that 79% of the activities in the Plan were complete or on target for completion and those which were overdue or delayed included a report of mitigating actions.

Some of the highlight achievements reported for 2017/18 include:

- Regular planning meetings for the Mayoral and local elections with a comprehensive count plan and training being developed for count staff and poll clerks. Count location confirmed as Excel Centre and enhanced security arrangements agreed for count and polling stations in partnership with the police;
- Agreed piloting of enhanced Postal Voting scheme with the Cabinet Office;
- New Communications Strategy adopted in 2017
- Weekly staff email newsletter with growing open rates and interaction with articles and an Intranet project manager appointed to drive improvements;
- Introduction of dedicated poster sites and information screens in council buildings to improve communication with staff and visiting public;
- Media consumption survey informing how to communicate more effectively with different audiences and an increased sign-up to e-newsletters;
- Move from weekly printed public newsletter to more focussed communications supporting thematic messages and projects;
- Revised governance structure to manage council owned property enabling the use of vacant buildings for housing and commercial use;
- 4 sites identified for use as community hubs;
- Grants management in partnership with local Voluntary and Community Sector and system mapping completed to enable new GIFTS software;

- Mainstream grants monitored by Grants Scrutiny Committee and Grants Determination Committee;
- Revised “TOWER” core values - Together, Open, Willing Excellent Respect -devised in consultation with staff and adopted;
- Staff Survey and Staff Wellbeing Survey completed;
- Refreshed Member/Officer Protocol and Whistleblowing Policy developed and adopted;
- Transformation programme actively engaging staff.

The Board noted the updates presented around each of the Plan themes and that due to timescales some projects had been delayed.

RESOLVED

1. That the draft update report attached as appendix 1 be noted.
2. That the revised milestone timescales in the improvement plan attached as appendix 2 be approved.

5. SPOTLIGHT - GRANTS

Corporate Director, Resources presented a Best Value Spotlight on Grants outlining information on the following areas: aims and objectives, key achievements and their expected impact, on-going work and future aims/targets.

The Board heard that:

- 90% of the recommendations of the Best Value Plan (BVP) had been implemented
- A review of the Third Sector Team had been completed and a restructure proposal has been consulted on and a final structure agreed for implementation.
- A web based grants system was being implemented that would provide greater functionality in terms of monitoring and reporting and would be more accessible for grant recipients and members. Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee (GSSC) had broadened its scope of engagement to include a wider grant-related remit. Under this, a review into recreational activities for young people had recently been completed.
- The grants framework would move towards commissioning. Strategy Policy and Performance officers were working on this framework with Tower Hamlets VCS and co-production was at the heart of the new arrangement; this would also include a Voluntary Sector Compact and Grants Policy.
- The next steps would include a review of GSSC, development of a GSSC work programme for the new municipal year and implementation of the remaining BVP actions.

The Board noted:

- The report of the reorganisation of the Third Sector Team.

- That the Chair of GSSC had had input into the development of the web-based facility and had also identified Member development needs.
- Some Member development had been delivered through mentoring. However targeted training was also planned in the new Municipal year for GSSC Members.
- That the Council was also working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny around improving the delivery of scrutiny.
- That there needed to be a mediating voice between large and small voluntary sector organisations.

The Board:

- Asked that the action plan outcomes be linked to the individual actions in the report.
- Noted that not all voluntary sector organisations would be able to deliver under a commissioned arrangement, asked that officers review/investigate what mechanisms would be suitable to deliver an appropriately balanced grant-making - commissioning environment to support a wide scope of voluntary sector projects.
- Asked that signposts are conveyed to Ward Councillors so that they also might mediate engagement between voluntary sector organisations and the Council.

RESOLVED

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the actions arising from the discussion be referred onward and taken forward.

Action by:

Z. Cooke, Corporate Director, Resources

6. ICT TRANSFORMATION

The Divisional Director, Information Technology presented an update on the transformation programme to deliver improvements in the Council's ICT arrangements across the organisation.

The Board heard that:

- Although ICT was not part of the BVP, it was significant in its delivery as it formed a key element of several services that featured in the Plan.
- Previously there had been underinvestment in ICT, however Cabinet had approved a significant improvement plan. This would be delivered in three phases: fix existing structures, modernise out-dated elements and transform the framework to futureproof the ICT environment.

The Board noted:

- That the specifications for ICT in the new Whitechapel Council premises will need to ensure that the Council will be fit for future.

- That there had been collaboration between Children's Services Directorate and the Corporate Director, Place to ensure that infrastructure was appropriate for the work patterns of Children's Services staff.
- That investments in technology went beyond premises based factors.
- That a portal where residents may report faults and repair requests was being developed and would be implemented once foundational platforms had been brought up to date.
- That the Executive was presently investigating whether an in-house or out-sourced environment would provide the most appropriate approach for the Council's business.
- That a customer relationship management approach would be incorporated into the IT transformation process. Additionally future provision would be assessed around the requirements of the organisation as a whole.
- That there was a programme to provide greater IT based information access for Members.
- That IT staff had been recruited that would enable the Council to achieve its aims around ICT provision and environment.
- There were many IT projects in progress presently. These would need to be assessed in order to ensure those of highest priority could be implemented accordingly.

The Board asked:

- That all systems that the Council intended to adopt should supply properly integrated solutions.
- That officers explore products and areas of good practice to ensure that the Council focuses its resources on products that will effectively contribute to the efficient operation of the organisation.

RESOLVED

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the actions arising from the discussion be referred onward and taken forward.

Action by:

A. Gorst, Divisional Director, IT

7. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT- PROGRESS REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services introduced the report which provided an update on progress in delivering improvements to Children's Services arising from the OFSTED report in April 2017.

The Board heard that:

- There had been scrutiny of the Children's Services Improvement Plan which had delivered a form of internal review that had been beneficial.

- There had been a monitoring visit from OFSTED in December 2017. This reported that most improvements were being sustained and in many cases further improved. The full letter was published on OFSTED's website.
- There had been a visit from the Department for Education which also gave positive feedback had also been given.
- Work was being undertaken around areas of concern identified and the organisation was aware of strengths and weaknesses.
- There was strong leadership and rigorous focus from Senior Leadership.
- Recruitment of permanent staff was ongoing.
- Areas for improvement identified were; consistency around Child Voice and embedding this into the social work model.
- Reviews were currently being undertaken around Chairs of Child Focus conferences, contacts at Front Door and recruitment and retention.
- There was confidence around data. This now reflected activity and officers were able to use this to inform their discussions and drive improvements.
- There were risks around the potential for change arising from the Local Elections and around sustainability of the improvements programme due to the challenging environment and timescales relating to the improvement notice.

The Board noted:

- There had been much progress which itself raised expectations of progress and created a challenge of maintaining the pace of progress.
- Issues of recruitment and retention and staff morale were factors important to achieving sustainable improvement.
- Partnership working had greatly improved.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) had considered the matter of recruitment and noted that accommodation was an influencing factor. OSC recommended that the Council consider whether this factor should be further explored.

The Board asked:

- That officers explore how to make best use of partnership working by identifying services that they may deliver and which then will enable the Council to focus on driving forward improvements.
- That officers consider the date for the completion of the improvement programme and how the completion will be achieved in the next phase.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress made in delivering the children's services improvement programme be noted.
2. That the next steps in the improvement journey which will be updated on in the next report be noted.
3. That the actions arising from the discussion be referred onward and taken forward.

Action by:

D. Jones, Corporate Director, Children's Services

8. CLEAR UP PROJECT - RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION

Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced the report which provided the Board with an update on progress on the recommendations for further action arising out of the Clear Up Report.

The Board heard that the majority of actions recommended were now complete and therefore the projects to which the actions related were now closed. Projects with actions outstanding relating to HR have been deferred until after the local elections.

The Board noted the progress reported.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

9. LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

The Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer presented the report which informed the Board of the scoping of the Peer Challenge and arrangements for delivery.

The Board noted:

- That undertaking the Peer Challenge would fulfil one of the Secretary of State's Directions, issued in March 2016, which required an independent review of achievement.
- That the Peer Challenge adopts a critical friend approach to deliver an assessment of progress.
- The scope would incorporate retrospective and forward facing elements.
- The timeline as set out at 3.6 of the report.
- That Members that would be involved in the review, interviews would be confirmed following the Local Elections.
- The role of OSC in delivering challenge to the organisation.
- That OSC was to make a response to the Select Committee Review of Scrutiny; this response would also provide useful information for the Peer Challenge.
- That the Local Government Association would provide support where there were new appointments to key roles around the Peer Challenge.

The Board asked:

- That the OSC work programme to be provided alongside the position statement should also reference its effectiveness and role in the organisation.
- That OSC work be linked into the Peer Challenge review.
- That a Focus Group be held as part of the onsite review giving opportunity to existing and former Scrutiny members, co-opted members and officers to present the full overview of the work and effectiveness of the Scrutiny function.
- That since the review was a corporate peer challenge, it should include cross-working between the themes outlined at 3.2 of the report.

The Board thanked the Independent Representative and Local Government Association Representative for their contribution to the planning of the Peer Challenge.

RESOLVED

1. That the key areas of focus for the scope for the peer challenge as detailed in paragraph 3.4 be noted.
2. That the actions requested in the above minute relating to providing evidence and input into the council's position statement and supporting documents according to the enclosed timeline with particular reference to lead officers highlighted in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.5 be taken forward.
3. That Board Members commit to work with councillors, key officers and stakeholders to ensure attendance and participation in interviews and discussions with the LGA Peer Challenge Team during the on-site element of the Peer Challenge in the week commencing 18th June 2018.
4. That the progress made with the preparation for the Peer Challenge and the revised timeline to delivering the Peer Challenge included in paragraph 3.6 be noted.

Action by:

William Tompsett, Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer

10. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.

Chair, Mayor John Biggs
Tower Hamlets Best Value Improvement Board