

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE TOWER HAMLETS BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT BOARD

HELD AT 6.05 P.M. ON MONDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2017

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

Members Present:

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

Officers Present:

Heather Daley	– (Divisional Director, HR & Transformation)
Janet Fasan	– (Divisional Director, Legal)
Paul Greeno	– (Senior Corporate and Governance Lawyer, Legal Services)
Afazul Hoque	– (Interim Service Manager, Strategy, Policy & Performance)
Shazia Hussain	– (Divisional Director, Customer Services)
Debbie Jones	– (Corporate Director, Children's Services)
Ann Sutcliffe	– (Acting Corporate Director, Place)
William Tompsett	– (Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer)
Antonella Burgio	– (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sirajul Islam and an apology for lateness was received from Sir Steve Bullock.

Apologies for absence were also noted from the following officers: Zena Cooke, Corporate Director, Resources and Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2017 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

VARY ORDER OF BUSINESS

Responding to a request, the Chair agreed to vary the order of business. Accordingly the Board discussed item 7 as the first item of business. Following this the Board resumed discussion of the items of business in the printed agenda order. For ease of reference the items that were discussed are recorded in these minutes as set out in the agenda.

4. BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2017-18 Q3 MONITORING REPORT

The Acting Service Manager, Strategy, Policy & Performance presented a summary of the report that:

- Over 80% of the actions were either completed or on target to be achieved by the deadline.
- The results of the annual resident survey indicated residents' perception of the council was improving - 79% said that they trust the Council.
- Work on the delivery of Community Hubs was progressing; one Hub was operational and three more were planned to be delivered in the next two years.
- Work on all elements of the forthcoming local elections continued to progress and the Council would take part in the Cabinet Office Enhanced Postal Voting Scheme pilot.
- Work was being undertaken on a new approach to community and third sector grants based on commissioning. This was being developed in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector.
- In regard to organisational culture, a refreshed member/officer protocol and a revised whistleblowing policy had been approved by Council. Additionally a Core Value launch event had taken place with included activities to engage staff.
- A community plan was being developed through the Tower Hamlets Partnership to establish a joint vision and priorities.

The Board considered the progress reported on each of the themes in the action plan and noted the following:

- The key achievements relating to the Communications theme reported at Appendix A.

- There were good reciprocal arrangements between Grants Determination and Grants Scrutiny Sub Committees with cross-party participation at scrutiny level.
- The Head of Electoral Services had recently retired and an officer had been successfully recruited to the position; the appointee would take up the post on 2 January 2018. Regular review and planning meetings with the Police have continued and resulting from these an understanding of the Police role expected (including a presence at Polling Stations) during the Poll has been clarified. Consultation with the Electoral Commission has also continued. The venue for the counting of votes has been provisionally identified and booked at the Excel Centre; however other in-borough venues continue to be explored. The comments of the Leader of the Conservative Group and Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee were noted.

The Board asked that the following matter be taken forward by officers:

- That appropriate milestones for the delivery of the Cabinet Office Enhanced Postal Voting Scheme pilot be established and incorporated into the project/action plan.

RESOLVED

1. That the update be noted
2. That officers take forward the above action identified during the discussion

5. SPOTLIGHT - PROPERTY

The Corporate Director, Place and Acting Divisional Director, Property and Major Programmes gave a presentation outlining matters pertinent to the fulfilment of the directions. The Board heard:

Asset Management – work was focussed around the following aims and objectives:

- that Council owned assets are properly managed,
- the property portfolio demonstrates value for money,
- that the service support and enhance service delivery,
- that value for money was achieved in the management, maintenance and use of land and buildings.

Key achievements included; documentation of a new framework around asset disposals, right-to-buy buybacks and more recently purchase of Poplar HARCA surplus properties. Work was being undertaken around rental of community buildings, vacant community buildings depot reviews and the regularisation of Council assets.

Community Hubs – the first Hub had been delivered and a further three were in progress for delivery in the period 2018 and 2019.

Capital Delivery – delivery of affordable new homes, schools projects and public realm projects had been achieved and an Affordable Housing Pipeline Programme had been established. Forthcoming goals for this area were to strengthen governance arrangements with client teams, review the current staff structure and ensure there is sufficient capacity to deliver projects on time and in-budget.

Facilities Management (FM) – a customer satisfaction survey and service matrix had been introduced. A telephone help desk for staff was now operational and the FM Team had achieved ISO9001 accreditation.

The Board noted:

- that property was a theme in the Best Value Improvement Action Plan.
- that the authority was implementing a rigorous approach to the use of council assets.
- a list of community buildings was available via the Council website.
- that within the scope of this theme, it was necessary also to consider community buildings managed by other organisations.
- that there would be challenges to achieve a consistent and transparent framework. The Board welcomed the offer of the Local Government Association (LGA) to source examples of good practice in regard to the management of property.

RESOLVED

1. That the spotlight report be noted
2. That LGA offer of assistance be noted.

6. IMPROVEMENT AREAS: CUSTOMER SERVICES & ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The Divisional Directors for Customer Service and for HR & Transformation each gave a presentation.

Customer Services - The Divisional Director for Customer Services gave a presentation outlining the key themes, progress and challenges in achieving modern customer services and where the customer continues to remain at the centre of Council focus. Drivers of the programme are; customer needs, the changing world, corporate culture, demand and exploitation of new technologies

The Board heard:

- That customer access is a theme which is being investigated to develop better insight into customers' preferred patterns of access in order to inform how Council services can be better offered to residents.
- That use of IT has expanded exponentially over the past 50 years and has influenced how the public wish to interact with Council.

- That the Council is required to change not just to meet in the new technological advances but also to meet the needs of a changing demographic (by 2030, over 50% of the borough will be aged under 30).
- That the residents' survey indicated that 90% of residents in the borough have access to the Internet and engage with the digital world in their personal lives. Therefore they do not need intensive levels of Council support.
- That future customer service would provide a seamless customer journey by changes to back office functions, use of technologies, and building on best practice and expertise. Risks and challenges to achieving this are: literacy, digital skills, ICT infrastructure, poor data and a citizen centred staff.

Responding to the presentation:

- The Board felt assured that the customer would remain the focus of this service throughout the changes proposed and drive of the types of service to be provided. The Board noted also that the intended transformation of this service was large and would require staff levels and capability matters to be addressed. Members were informed that the Council's ICT infrastructure was a factor which limited staff capability as they were unable to access tools necessary to properly deliver their role.
- It was acknowledged that changed culture was also needed and therefore the Council intended to explore how the Idea Stores might form part of the 'front door' element of the provision. To achieve this it was necessary to progress these outlets from paper-based processes.
- The Board considered that although there would be risks, progress should not be impeded by these. It was necessary to adopt a 'deliver and test' approach rather than delay implementation to find first an optimal solution. It was noted that that computer literacy levels in the borough were approximately 70% therefore such skills should be utilised so that the Council might better target its resources to areas of greater need and devise better ways of engagement for the vulnerable and hard to reach. Delivery of digital interfaces with the customer would allow the Council to put more resources and thought into how it can deliver its face-to-face services and where these would be required. Members were informed that suitable IT infrastructure and web-based access for community safety matters would enable the Council to respond more quickly and effectively to issues raised in the community. This would enable the Council-community relationship to evolve.
- The Board observed that much could be achieved by better use of IT but it was necessary also to ensure that there is a human face for residents and that service quality is retained.
- The Board noted that there were very many different contact numbers across the Council and highlighted the potential consequences of the inadequate administration of customer contact numbers. Services such as the Police have experienced loss of intelligence as a

consequence of a decline in the use of the nonemergency contact number. Members were informed that there was a managed programme to progressively terminate unused and surplus contact numbers which were not used or were not answered. Additionally the Council was researching arrangements at Councils such as Brent and Hackney which operated advanced IT arrangements.

- The Board was informed of activity in the following areas:
 - Registrars -- directly responding to email requests
 - Parking Permits -- will be online by March 2018
 - Revenues and Benefits – an Web facility is being created which will allow online transactions.

To enable service delivery to be transformed in the above areas, the pages of the Council website for these services were presently being redesigned.

The Board asked that:

- Officers identify five beneficial (customer service) outcomes that are visible and can be quickly achieved and pursue their implementation.
- That progress on the delivery of these be reported to the Board.

Organisational Culture – The Divisional Director, Human Resources and Transformation gave a presentation. She informed the Board that:

- This area had been part of the original directions and had been identified as a key issue going forward.
- An action plan with key themes had been developed.
- The case for change, key themes and the action plan were informed by the desired outcomes that the Council had identified.
- It will be necessary to plan, act and deliver in all of the key areas; this will important in assessing the Council's impact.

Responding to the presentation, the Board:

- Noted that organisational culture was an important theme throughout the Council; Commissioners had previously identified Member behaviours and consistency of approach as two areas for attention within this theme.
- Was satisfied that outcomes incorporated tangible changes and the action plan incorporated targets around employee health and noted work done around the new Healthy Workplace Charter and to gather intelligence around staff views.
- Heard that Chief Executive's Roadshows and staff engagements indicated concerns around leadership and future workforce uncertainty.
- Noted that there could be changes to established organisational structures which could require staff to engage with many service reviews.
- Noted that the experiences of encountering and engaging with change in Children's Services Directorate might provide useful casework for the wider organisation. Additionally the organisation should take account of lessons learned from the amalgamation of Children's and

Adults Services in 2014, noting the role that Members performed at this time.

- Noted that there should be a mechanism for checking the fitness of work structures. The Divisional Director advised that this would be indicated by assessing whether outcomes had been achieved and by Member scrutiny.
- Noted that bringing in change was also a learning process. It was therefore necessary to be able to reflect on the choices made and learn from them.

The Board asked that:

- Feedback and themes arising out of the staff health survey be reported to Cabinet.
- Feedback on action being taken to address Member issues be reported to the Board

RESOLVED

1. That the presentations of the Divisional Directors for Customer Service and for HR & Transformation be noted
2. That the above actions identified as during the discussion be taken forward

7. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT- PROGRESS REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services presented the report in forming the Board that:

- This second quarterly update outlined progress made in delivering improvements to children's services arising from the findings of the OFSTED inspection in April 2017.
- A visit had been carried out by OFSTED during the week of 11 December 2017 involving a 'front door' visit, and looking at in-depth work on Family Support and Protection Teams. A second letter was, arising from this visit would be published by OFSTED at the end of January 2018.
- Following its visit, OFSTED provided the following feedback:
 - Improvements had been observed - changes at front door were now embedded and consistently implemented. The Family Support Team has also implemented some changes; these were assessed as fragile at the time of visiting and there were still some challenges. Assurances were awaited around what services' workload would be case led.
 - The records of 50 children were sampled; it was found that none were at risk and there had been improvements around making work child-centred.

- Caseloads were found to be still too variable although some progress reducing caseload was noted.
 - The volumes of contacts at 'front door' were large.
 - There was positive feedback around investment in workforce strategy and now OFSTED awaited evidence of more permanent staff in the workforce.
- The Children's Services Improvement Board and Children's Operational Board acknowledged the feedback and will build on the positive outcomes of this visit.
 - The Cabinet Member was encouraged with the progress made, although there remained work to do.
 - The next OFSTED visit was planned for early May 2018. At this time OFSTED would examine themes across the whole of the service and its partnerships.
 - OFSTED's latest visit in December 2017 had not identified any children at significant immediate risk.
 - The fortnightly meeting between Mayor, Cabinet Member and senior officers was an important instrument to ensure that the service did not become complacent.

The Corporate Director, Children's Services advised that she had met with the Chief Executive and her staff to discuss the outcome of the OFSTED visit. The key messages of the visit had been conveyed to all. She also noted that corporate and practical leadership are necessary to ensure that progress is maintained.

The Board noted that:

- ICT was a risk and agreed that it should review ICT arrangements. Officers acknowledged that ICT was an area for improvement and informed the Board that this would be addressed as part of the corporate ICT improvement programme.
- Reducing levels of agency social workers was a problem nationally; notwithstanding this it would be necessary to set targets to achieve this outcome. The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services responded highlighting that fragility reported following the visit was linked to staff churn, in particular at the 'front door' element of the service where there were a number of agency staff. The Board acknowledged that in the circumstances, the task of increasing the numbers of permanent social workers at the authority would be challenging to achieve. Additionally it was noted that the caseload had increased therefore interim staff had been engaged to meet the additional demand.

The Chair highlighted that there was a role for the whole Council to consider around how it was able to act as a 'corporate parent' and necessary work with NHS and other Partners in children's safeguarding.

The Board asked that the following matters be taken forward:

- That ICT arrangements should be reviewed by the Best Value Improvement Board
- That targets toward reducing levels of agency social workers should be set.
- Consider how the NHS and other Partners may be engaged to fulfil their role in children's safeguarding

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted
2. That the above actions identified as during the discussion be taken forward

8. CLEAR UP PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION

The Senior Corporate and Governance Lawyer presented the report which provided an update to the Board on progress of the recommendations for further action arising from the Clear Up Project.

The Board heard that, since its completion, Legal Services have acted to ensure that Project recommendations have been actioned; these were reported at paragraphs 3.6 - 3.8. Action monitoring continues and is reported quarterly to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team.

The Board:

- Noted the query raised by Councillor Golds in relation to case ref CU031 and that he would take up these concerns with the Chief Executive.
- Enquired whether the costs incurred in undertaking the Project could be made known to the Council. Members were advised that officers would investigate if this type of data could be provided.
- Asked that any outstanding issues relating to Cabinet Members' portfolios be circulated to the relevant Member.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted
2. That a summary would be brought to a future meeting.

9. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was presented and the Board Members were invited to suggest additions to the Plan via the Chief Executive or the Mayor.

The Board requested that the following matters be added to the agenda for discussion at the next meeting; ICT, Peer Review, Clear Up Project, and Children's Services Improvement Board.

RESOLVED

1. That the Forward Plan be noted.
2. That the above topics identified be brought for discussion at the next meeting.

10. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.15 p.m.

Chair, Mayor John Biggs
Tower Hamlets Best Value Improvement Board