

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON MONDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2018

**GEORGE GREEN'S SCHOOL, 100 MANCHESTER RD, ISLE OF DOGS, LONDON
E14 3DWG**

Members Present:

Councillor Abdal Ullah (Chair)	
Councillor Marc Francis (Vice-Chair)	– Lead for Resources
Councillor Dipa Das	– Lead for Place
Councillor James King	
Councillor Kyrsten Perry	
Councillor Bex White	– Lead for Governance
Councillor Andrew Wood	

Co-opted Members Present:

Neil Cunningham	– Parent Governors
Joanna Hannan	– Representative of Diocese of Westminster
Fatiha Kassouri	– Parent Governors
Ahmed Hussain	– Parent Governors
Khoyrul Shaheed	– Muslim Faith Community

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Danny Hassell

Apologies:

Councillor Sufia Alam	– Lead for Children's Services
Councillor Mohammed Pappu	
Dr Phillip Rice	– Church of England Representative

Officers Present:

Rebecca Abrahams	– Headteacher - St Lukes CE Primary School
Elizabeth Bailey	– Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
Jill Baker	– Principal - George Green's School
Sara Haynes	– Headteacher - Arnhem Wharf Primary School
Afazul Hoque	– (Head Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Debbie Jones	– (Corporate Director, Children's)
Carl Kemp	– Community Manager for

Jack Kerr	Employability & Access – Strategy Policy & Performance Officer
Christine McInnes	– (Divisional Director, Education and Partnership, Children's)
Matthew Vaughan	– (Political Advisor to the Conservative Group, Democratic Services, LPG)
David Knight	– (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting.

2. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

2.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th September, 2018

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th September, 2018 to be approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

2.2 Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16th October, 2018

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16th October, 2018 to be approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

The Committee noted that on 16th October, 2018 the following decisions made by the Mayor in Cabinet on Wednesday, 26 September 2018 had been “called in” (Minute 2.2 above refers):

- **Item 6.2** securing the future of early years services – phased closure of the three local authority childcare day nurseries; and
- **Item 11.1** future management of the integrated community equipment service.

The main points of the discussion may be summarised below:

The Committee felt that:

Call-Ins keen to reflect upon the experience and going forward need to look at good practice on why we are doing a Call In.

Felt need to have an early dialogue to shape policy and key decisions.

Wish to see more engagement between the Executive and Scrutiny felt good to have a debrief on how it went and wanted to see how we can scrutinise the work of the Council. Wish to see presentations coming forward to O&S on issues such as the Waste Contract. O&S felt that they have a vital role to play in shaping policy through a constructive dialogue.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

5. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

5.1 Perspectives of educational aspiration

The Committee received a presentation that provided them with the parents and pupils (sixth formers) perspectives of educational aspirations at George Green:

The main points of the discussion may be summarised below:

The Committee noted:

- That George Green gives children the opportunity to grow and take up the opportunity to improve themselves;
- How George Green supports those students who have mental illness that can cause functional impairment in their day-to-day lives in school, at home and with peers. Noted that childhood mental disorders include a range of disorders that can be diagnosed and begin in childhood, including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), behaviour disorders, mood and anxiety disorders;
- That the transition to secondary school can be challenging for some young people, while others may struggle to cope with specific life events or experience increased stress and anxiety during adolescence;
- That the school-based counselling and mental health services provided at George Green helps the young people to achieve their full potential and deal positively with the difficulties they face. There are both universal and targeted services for young people in the school,

alongside support for parents and consultation and advice for school staff.

- That the children feel that are given so many opportunities to do more than they could ever believe possible;
- That George Green's mission is to be a traditional place of learning with a rich history, underpinned by a commitment to providing exceptional experiences through clubs, quality teaching and impressive links with prestigious businesses (e.g. Business Mentors) and universities, which is mirrored by the high expectations the School has of the students and the traditional values of hard-work and discipline;
- That master classes are offered to students on what is available through Canary Wharf and they have learned a lot from visiting the various companies who are based at Canary Wharf.
- That from studying for their GCSE's students have learned a lot more about what it is they want to be and what they can do and what stimulates them (e.g. In Year 10 the belief in what they can as students achieve has expanded beyond what they thought would be the path that they would originally follow);
- That George Green enables students to try new things and take on challenges that they could have done in the past;
- That the School does not just focus on the top set but and develops a culture of excellence that permeates every classroom and is a focus not on simply getting the best grade, but on getting the best education and creating a lifelong passion for learning;
- Once a student has entered year 7 they have the opportunity to receive mentoring through Barclays Bank to help them to enter the world of work. Also through Morgan Stanley and BP plc there is space to build relationships although it is dependent on what the students are willing to put in; and
- George Green have thought carefully about parental involvement **e.g.** to help families provide support for student learning and to make continued education a goal for all students.

5.2 Educational Aspiration - Starting Early

The Committee received a presentation from Rebecca Abrahams (Headteacher - St Luke's CE Primary School) and Sara Haynes (Headteacher - Arnhem Wharf Primary School) on the work being undertaken to promote educational aspiration in primary school.

The main points of the discussion may be summarised below:

The Committee noted that:

- The promotion of educational aspiration in primary schools is about what is needed to help the young people to move along that path and that both St Luke's and Arnhem Wharf have high expectations for all the students and believe in the children and their families;

- The partnership with families is the key and developing the essential skills on the importance of issues such as regular attendance and information for parents on learning themselves whether it be language skills; personal budgeting or helping parents apply for jobs;
- There is also the skill and care in keeping the curriculum very rich and recognition that every child has a talent. Therefore, there is lot of investment in not just the core subjects but also an understanding the role that sport and the arts play in a child's development;
- When working with children whose parents have provided them with rich experiences they are more likely to engage in lifelong learning through a broad and balanced curriculum;
- There are a number of pupils needing work to overcome adversity as some children need support e.g. emotional wellbeing and resilience to thrive and not just survive;
- It is important to develop oral and well as the written skills so that they can present their views to their peers and adults which will enable them to develop the knowledge that their views matter;
- The partnerships that have been developed over a number of years such as the mentoring schemes have improved children's self-esteem. There partnerships are important such as the Dragons Den project with HSBC Bank plc where children in teams had to develop a business plan and present to a group of senior HSBC executives. Through such partnerships the children are able to learn from the very best and to raise their aspirations as to what they can achieve;
- A big challenge is how to address what has happened in the children's first 3-4 years of life and that the families need to access services that can help them to give their children the best start in life;
- St Luke's and Arnhem Wharf both have a high degree of turnover that presents a challenge. This has arisen because there are surplus places in other parts of Tower Hamlets and families move around the borough but the schools are working to minimise that happening;
- It is the Heads duty to reach out for assistance and when they have the help received is of a high quality and in Tower Hamlets there is considerable a sharing of best practice and working together to share for the benefit of the children;
- The Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) provides a highly successful collaboration that has characterised and underpinned education in Tower Hamlets over the last two decades. Tower Hamlets schools operate as a family to support, challenge and encourage each other in their determination to do the very best for every child. Member schools have access to a rich membership and a strong model of school improvement. THEP whilst independent of the Local Authority works closely with it and is supported by it. It also works closely with a range of other local organisations who give local children and young people the best possible start in life.
- There are now fewer resources than before to facilitate early intervention, information sharing and planning across services for babies /children under the age of 5 years regarding their learning/development and or physical/medical needs;

- Most schools do provide pastoral support for pupils and also have external business teaching mentors to help with self-development;
- Help is available for those families seeking an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan or EHCP) for a child. Although the EHCP process is time consuming and this is compounded by pupil mobility and in year transfers with pupils arriving mid-year without an EHCP; and
- As some parents have self-selected schools outside of the established community of schools this has had an impact on schools when children move to non-LA Schools. As such schools are not always part of the THEP and it is important to work collaboratively within the family of local schools.

5.3 Promoting aspiration at George Green School

The Committee received a presentation from Jill Baker (Principal George Green's School) and Carl Kemp (Community Manager for Employability & Access) on the initiatives to promote educational aspiration at George Green School, including approaches to strengthening employability, complexity of building resilience and challenges for specific cohorts. The main points of the discussion may be summarised below:

The Committee:

- Noted that there is a focus on the small details with staff/students and high expectations for all the school community;
- Consideration is given to developing resilience (home learning) and character;
- Noted that the school sets high targets for staff and students with the whole focus being on excellent outcomes and building character so that they can achieve their dreams;
- Noted that students are given a voice in how the school is managed;
- Noted the focus for the School is helping to build on the dream;
- Noted the programs are from Year 7 to Year 13 and the aim is to bring life to the program through a comprehensive network of partners (i.e. It is about showing students what is out there and having a range of partners who can provide help beyond their core businesses so that students can gain an understanding of what is being offered). However, if funding would be reduced then it would not be possible to sustain the current level of progress;
- Stated that they want to find a way to work for a solution to help those families in greatest need and welcomed an honest discussion on this issue with special reference to White British children;
- Expressed concern at self-segregation by some families and what can be done to address the impact of self-segregation.
- Was informed that the School has a designated Work Path Officer in the Careers Team and the School has had consistent support but requires work to ensure it functions properly and effectively. However, the numbers of work placements within LBTH are very small and the

Council needs to be seen as a place for students to seek employment;
and

- Was advised that George Green does provide study facilities and teaching facilities outside of the school day including during the holidays as well as at lunch times.

6. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG 2018/19

The Committee noted that the Query and Action Log 2018/2019 had been circulated prior to the meeting for their information and comment.

7. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS (CABINET FORWARD PLAN)

The Committee received and noted the Forthcoming Decisions Plan (or 'Cabinet Forward Plan') that contained information on those significant decisions that the Council expects to take over the next few months.

8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Quarter 2 Corporate Budget Monitoring Report

The received and noted a report that introduced the Quarterly Budgetary monitoring report for Quarter 2 (September 2018). It included details of the Capital and Revenue outturn position, the projected position of the Housing revenue account and outlined progress being made against Savings targets. The Council it was noted has a duty to achieve Best Value in terms of economy efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of its services and the expenditure of its resources. The report detailed that the expenditure of the money will be based upon competitive exercises performed either individually or through the use of pre-existing framework agreements.

The main points of the discussion may be summarised below:

The Committee:

- Noted that the Council could choose to monitor its budgetary performance against an alternative timeframe but it is considered that the reporting schedule provides the appropriate balance to allow strategic oversight of the budget by members and to manage the Council's exposure to financial risk. More frequent monitoring is undertaken by officers and considered by individual service Directors and the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) including approval of management action. However, the view was expressed that there was a need for a clearer explanation of the budgetary performance for there to be a clearer comprehension;
- Noted that the additional funding streams from Government will be set out so that it is clear where the funding has been spent e.g. winter pressures and adult social care;

- Noted that the Council is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. Accordingly, the Council's chief finance officer has established financial procedures to ensure the Council's proper financial administration. These include procedures for budgetary control;
- Noted that regarding investments the Council has worked on this in a co-ordinated fashion that has meant that an above the rate of inflation return of 3%-4% has been achieved; and
- Noted that Lewisham Council have developed a new way to scrutinise the budgetary process and details would be made available to the Committee.

8.2 Council Tax Reduction Scheme Challenge Session Report

The Committee received a report that detailed the report and outlined recommendations of the Scrutiny Challenge Session report on the issue of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS).

The main points of the discussion may be summarised below:

The Committee noted that:

- The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) challenge session had been chaired by Councillor Marc Francis in his role as Scrutiny Lead for Resources in order to examine the impact of proposed changes to the Council's LCTRS as highlighted in a report to Cabinet in July 2018 and these proposed changes are currently being consulted on and are due to be presented to the Cabinet prior to a formal decision being taken at Full Council in January 2019;
- The scrutiny challenge session had been underpinned by five core questions:
 1. Are the proposals in the Cabinet Report the best options for residents of Tower Hamlets?
 2. What is the financial impact of these proposals on our vulnerable residents and what support can the council offer?
 3. Are other London councils applying the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) and is this appropriate for self-employed residents?
 4. How are self-employed residents supported through the impact of LCTRS and how is Section 13A being implemented to support these groups?
 5. What support is in place to mitigate the need to instigate council tax debt recovery and support?
- Noted that HM Revenues and Customs latest poverty profile shows that Tower Hamlets is the 10th most deprived local authority in England in terms of its average deprivation score with 18,875 children living in poverty. Census figures found that 78 percent of Bangladeshi residents

lived in households receiving council tax benefit, compared with 33 percent of other (non-Bangladeshi) residents;

- Noted that the Challenge Session had identified that clarity was needed on how the changes will affect those families being disproportionately impacted by the revisions to the CTRS is therefore understandably at the heart of the review and a focus for recommendations;
- The use by private firms of bailiffs to collect Council tax debt should be reviewed and the Council should consider a more ethical approach to debt management that helps residents at risk of falling into debt;
- Proper income and expenditure assessments should be carried out to agree what families in debt can pay and over what period. Whilst those who can afford to pay but refuses to do so should be pursued using effective; ethical and legal processes e.g. to have an ethical way of working with individuals in debt to resolve their financial problems – protecting the vulnerable while maximising the money collected.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The Committee received and noted those questions to be presented at Cabinet by the Chair in relation to unrestricted business on the agenda – **See Appendix 1**

10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Committee agreed to consider the briefing from the lead Members at the next meeting.

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

Nil items.

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As 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 9.15 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdal Ullah
Overview & Scrutiny Committee