

# Overview & Scrutiny Committee



**TOWER HAMLETS**

**Annual Report 2018-19**

## Chair's Foreword

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I am pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2018-19. This municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered an extensive range of issues to identify how the Council can improve outcomes for local people.

Overview and Scrutiny plays an integral role in the Council's operations, with its influence being seen in the budget setting process, policy development and the drive for continuous service improvement. I believe it is vital to ensure that robust Overview and Scrutiny arrangements continue to be a key element of the Council's governance and decision-making arrangements, particularly given the current budget pressures the Council is facing and the political composition of the Council.

It has been another busy and interesting year for Overview and Scrutiny, and I'm proud of the work that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-Committees have achieved. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the Committee Members and Officers for their contribution at our meetings in the past year.

Over 2018-19 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out a 'deep dive' review of three focus areas: Educational aspiration, Employment aspiration and Anti-social Behaviour and drug-related crimes. While the subject of a separate report, I will simply say I am particularly proud of this work. It allowed Scrutiny Members to hear evidence from a range of presenters to identify key challenges and areas for improvement.

Of course, scrutiny doesn't end with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Scrutiny lead members have been investigating a broad range of important topics from domestic violence, substance misuse and adult social care charging (Health scrutiny); mainstream grants and emergency funding (Grants scrutiny); and supply and quality of housing (Housing Scrutiny).

Throughout the year, Members and officers have worked hard to ensure the effectiveness of scrutiny and continued to build relationships with local residents, Council partners and other stakeholders. We have been keen to promote participation and capture the community voice in our meetings, by holding scrutiny meetings in different locations around the borough.

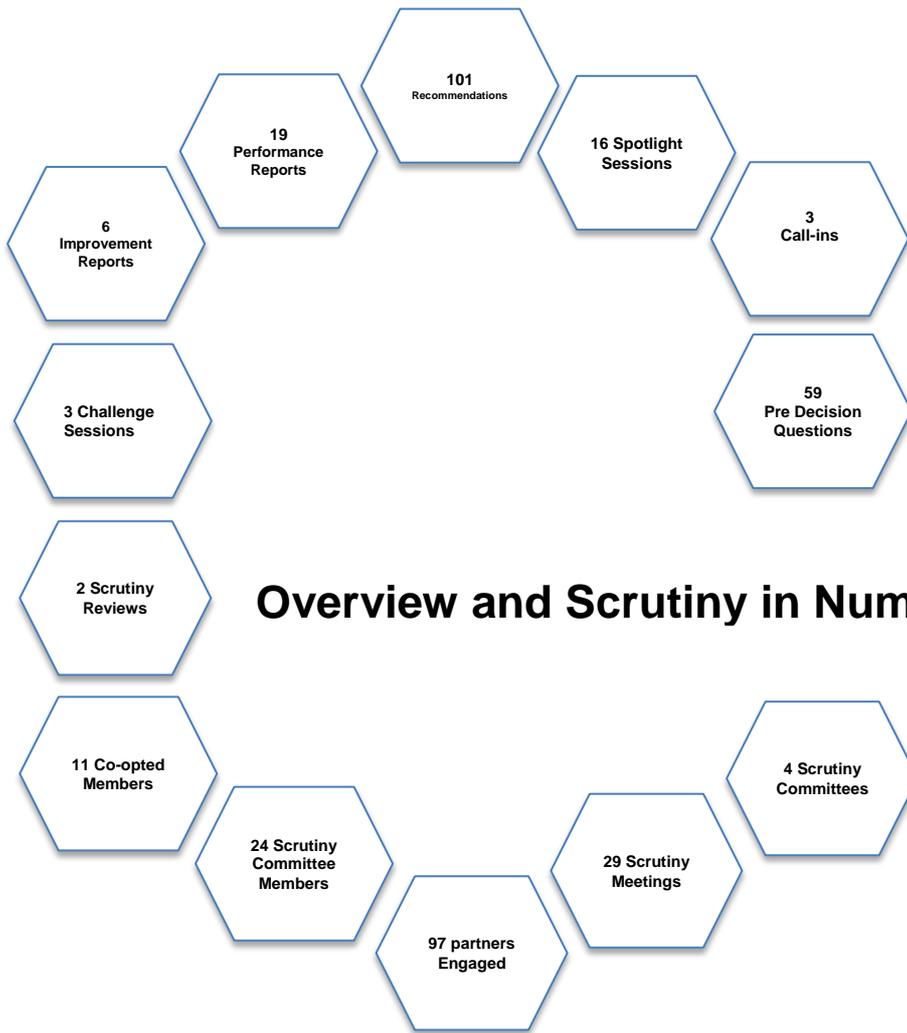
I was particularly excited about the recent involvement of the Young Mayor and the Youth Council in the scrutiny process. I was inspired by their engagement with OSC this year and hope the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may work closely with them next year.

I hope all of scrutiny's activities have laid a good foundation for the next year and hope you find this report interesting and informative, and urge you to be engaged with scrutiny in the coming year.

Councillor Abdal Ullah  
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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## Overview and Scrutiny in Numbers 2018-19

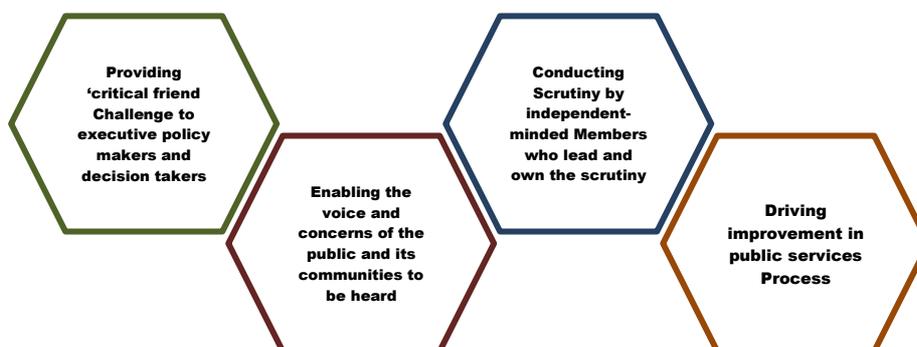
## 2. Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets 2018-19

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- 2.1. Overview and Scrutiny committees were introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 to hold decision-makers to account by reviewing policies and decisions made by the Council and other organisations involved in delivering public services. This includes:



- 2.2. Tower Hamlets' approach to delivering an effective overview and scrutiny function is underpinned by Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) four principles of good scrutiny:



- 2.3. Skills development for scrutiny Members has continued to be supported by the CfPS through away days, development and support programmes focusing on key areas such as budget scrutiny, Children Services scrutiny and effective questioning skills.

### Scrutiny Committees

- 2.4. For 2018-19, Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) remains the main Member-led body, holding the executive decision makers to account through examining and scrutinising issues of strategic importance and key areas in detail. To support this, OSC has continued with three Sub-committees covering Health, Housing and Grants.
- 2.5. Sub-committees continue to be chaired by elected Members (Scrutiny Leads), who hold responsibility for leading on the scrutiny of specific portfolios, contribute to the role of the Committee and

offer effective challenge to these areas. Children Services and Governance continue with scrutiny leads for their respective areas and their work is covered later in this report.

### Membership

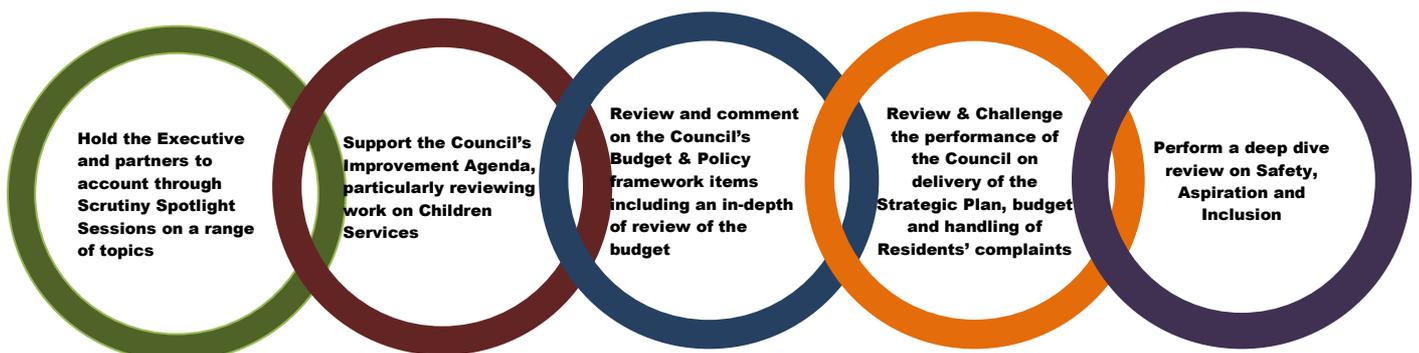
2.6. The elected councillor membership of the Committee is politically proportionate and representative of the composition of the Council. Accordingly, the Committee membership consists of eleven elected councillors, including the Chair, and six education co-opted representatives. The co-opted representatives are parent governors and faith representatives from the Church of England, Roman Catholic and Muslim communities.

2.7. The membership of the Committee was as follows:

Name	Role
Councillor Abdal Ullah	Chair
Councillor Marc Francis	Vice-Chair and Scrutiny Lead for Resources
Councillor Sufia Alam	Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services
Councillor Bex White	Scrutiny Lead for Governance
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	Scrutiny Lead for Health, Adults & Community
Councillor Dipa Das	Scrutiny Lead for Place
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin	Member
Councillor James King	Member
Councillor Kyrsten Perry	Member
Councillor Mohammed Pappu	Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Member
Neil Cunningham	Co-Opted Member, Parent Governor
Joanna Hannan	Co-Opted Member, Roman Catholic Representative
Ahmed Hussain	Co-Opted Member, Parent Governor
Fatiha Kassouri	Co-Opted Member, Parent Governor
Dr Phillip Rice	Co-Opted Member, Church of England Representative
Khoyrul Shaheed	Co-Opted Member, Muslim Representative

### Work Programme 2018/19

2.8. At the beginning of this municipal year, the Committee agreed a work plan for 2018/19. The Committee identified the following themes they would like to focus on throughout the year:



## **Safety, Aspiration and Inclusion**

- 2.9. The Committee performed a review of Safety, Aspiration, and Inclusion in Tower Hamlets. This review focused on two key priorities of the Council's strategic plan; people are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities and a borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in. The Committee also took into account the concerns of residents expressed during the May 2018 election and Annual Residents Survey, particularly around community safety, which highlighted anti-social behaviour (ASB) and drug related crimes as a key concern.
- 2.10. The Committee carried out a 'deep dive' review of each of the focus areas; community safety, educational aspiration and employment aspiration, by hearing evidence from a range of presenters to identify key challenges and areas for improvement for each of the focus areas. The Committee focused community safety discussions on partnership working to tackle ASB and drug related crimes. In regards to educational aspiration, the Committee's discussion focused on the benefits of work experience, supporting parents and pupils from early years, mobility and social cohesion, tackling under attainment for White British children, and funding. Finally, the deep dive review of employment aspiration focused on partnership working with local businesses to support residents to share in the benefits of growth in the borough, providing young people with opportunities to develop soft skills, access to different routes into professions and how parents can support young people. The Committee also discussed the council's draft Growth and Economic Development plan and 'preparing our young people for success' and developing the graduate scheme.
- 2.11. The review made 16 recommendations covering areas of community safety, educational aspiration and employment aspiration.
- 2.12. The *Safety, Aspiration, and Inclusion in Tower Hamlets* report can be found at appendix 1.

## **3. Scrutiny Spotlight Sessions**

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**Scrutiny  
Spotlight  
Sessions**

Refers to a Cabinet Member and / or a senior leader from a stakeholder organisation that provides an overview of their work, including risk within their portfolio followed by a discussion on service improvement.

### **Safeguarding Adults Board**

- 3.1. The Committee received a presentation from the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Adult Board. Given the significant emphasis the Council has placed on achieving improvements within Children's Services, the Committee wanted to ensure that adults safeguarding remains an organisational priority. The Committee was pleased to hear that a significant focus has been placed on empowering older adults to report issues, particularly when the abuse occurs in their own homes.
- 3.2. The Committee challenged whether the Council monitors the quality of commissioned services and partner organisations services. They were informed that standards for commissioned services remained the same as in-house and the Council implement quality monitoring officers for the services provided via commissioned services in homes and in residential accommodation.
- 3.3. The Committee noted that the Council aims to use the Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SAR) to identify trends and learning from serious cases. An action plan is developed after each SAR to highlight issues and explore where there are recurring issues such as neglect, managing medication and how services are commissioned. The discussion also focused on the work the Council is undertaking to tackle neglect and loneliness and whether cost implications influenced residents opting out of homecare.
- 3.4. The Committee recognised that this is an area of significant importance for residents and recommended that adults safeguarding should be monitored closely as part of the Committee's future work programme.

### **Prevent Duty**

- 3.5. As of July 2015, local authorities hold a legal duty to prevent terrorism (the Prevent Duty). The Committee received a progress update on the recommendations from the Prevent Duty Scrutiny Review. The Committee's discussion focused on the assessment of referrals and the work, which is being undertaken in schools. The Committee want to see better evidence which demonstrates raised awareness across all Tower Hamlets communities so that Muslim communities do not feel targeted. The Committee expressed their concern that whilst there has been over 163 briefings delivered, there was little evidence to show that it has been mainstreamed. More work is required to support communities and convey the prevent message across all age groups.

### **Street Cleanliness, Waste Collection and Recycling**

- 3.6. The Committee noted the Mayor had agreed to bring the waste collection, recycling and street cleansing service in-house to “improve services for residents” from 1 April 2020. The council’s existing contract with waste management firm Veolia is due to end at that time. The service aims to minimise waste generation, maximise recycling of wastes generated, and properly dispose of wastes that cannot be recycled.
- 3.7. The Committee’s questioning highlighted residents key concerns of fly tipping, missed bin collections, dog fouling and street cleanliness. Dog fouling is a concern for many residents on housing estates and whilst there are various means available to housing providers to take action against dog owners who allow their dogs to defecate on estates there is concern that not every provider is robust in their response. Moreover, certain fly-tipping behaviours are seen as more socially acceptable by perceptions of ‘helping others out’, for example leaving an item out for someone else to reuse. There is a lack of understanding by residents, landlords and businesses about the impacts of fly-tipping and many see the behaviour as low impact and low cost. There is an expectation that some residents, landlords and businesses seem to think that fly-tipped items will be collected quickly and without repercussions which reinforce perceptions that fly-tipping is ‘low impact’. Certain fly-tipping behaviours are seen as more socially acceptable by perceptions of ‘helping others out’, for example leaving an item out for someone else to reuse.

### **Mayor’s Spotlight**

- 3.8. The Committee held two spotlights with Mayor John Biggs. In July the Committee noted the Mayor’s key strategic priorities in relation to his vision for 2018/2019 which included; addressing poverty and social exclusion, maintaining progress on Children Services, investing in IT, setting up a Brexit Commission, improving air quality and tackling ASB and crime. The Committee considered the Mayor’s strategic priorities when developing its own work programme. In particular they questioned the Council’s plans to deal with abandoned vehicles, electrical vehicle charging points and plans for improving parks and youth access to sports in the borough.
- 3.9. At the December meeting, the Committee heard an account of the achievements the Council had made since the May 2018 election. The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge highlighted the improvements made by the Council and the Committee was pleased to hear of findings which focused on the council’s strong political and officer

leadership, healthy financial position and positive shift in organisational culture. The Committee welcomed news that the improvement journey resulted in the ending of the Government directions. The Committee's questioning covered a number of areas including; how school planning helps alleviate difficulties in school funding, what consideration is given to children's health and access to cheap unhealthy food in licensing and planning applications, and how green spaces are being preserved in light of the increasing need for new housing. The Committee would like more opportunity to engage the Executive to influence the council's policy development, for example they would like to jointly establish terms of reference on charging for homecare, work together on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme around the minimum floor income, and review the two child allowance to understand the impact on universal credit and housing benefit and aligning the council scheme with the governments scheme.

### **Chief Executive Spotlight**

- 3.10. The Committee received a verbal presentation from the Chief Executive of the council which focused on the council's performance and future directions. The Chief Executive outlined plans for a new Strategic Plan which would help move the council to be more outcomes focused. As part of this process the council has revised its set of strategic performance indicators with the aim of measuring the impact on residents' lives. The Committee requested the opportunity to carefully review the council's performance indicators as it was noted that under half of the targets had been achieved by the 6 month period. Additionally, the Committee focused on the proposals for Tower Rewards which cover changes to terms and conditions for staff, benefits to support staff and rewarding excellence. The Chief Executive made clear that it was an important and challenging issue for the council and that management was working to achieve effective dialogue with staff and Trade Unions. The Committee requested that the changes to terms and conditions of local schools be undertaken in consistent approach. The Chief Executive also provided an overview of sickness absence and stated that staff sickness has dropped to 10.5% per annum compared to 10.9% in the previous year, which is higher than the local government average. The main reasons for sickness were stress, depression and muscular skeletal issues. The Committee recommended that the council support staff in remaining fit and healthy and advised more work was required to reduce sickness to the local government average. The Committee was therefore pleased to hear that the council was working on a

sickness policy with the Trade Unions to support staff and reduce the loss of productivity.

### **Children's Services Improvement**

- 3.11. The Committee continued to deliver a 'critical friend' challenge to Children Services, following the Ofsted report (April 2017), rating the service as 'inadequate'. They were provided with expert advice and support from the independent Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board as well as specialist training from the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support them. The Committee was encouraged by the progress achieved by the Children's improvement Board and the commitment offered by the Mayor, Members and senior officers to drive improvement. The Committee had allocated a significant amount of its work programme to scrutinise the implementation of the Children Improvement Plan and received quarterly updates on its progress.
- 3.12. The Committee highlighted numerous concerns to support the improvement journey and questioned the level of support that Children services received on Human Resources and ICT issues. The Committee scrutinised the timeframe for converting of temporary staff to become permanent and wanted to see this process improved. Equally, the Committee was also concerned with the timeliness of completing health assessments (which had not improved since initial Ofsted inspection) and wanted to see a focus on making this process more robust and efficient. Furthermore, the Committee raised concerns about the outcomes for children if the final stage of the improvement plan is not achieved.
- 3.13. The Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People and the interim Divisional Director for Children Social Care which outlined the progress made since the previous Ofsted monitoring visit and preparations for further visits in August 2018. The Committee was informed that quality assessments were subject to regular audits and individual officers were responsible to oversee each case.
- 3.14. The Committee questioned the expectations of the council's positioning in the short and longer term. They were informed that the aim was to achieve a 'good' rating on leadership and management to maintain direction of travel. Moreover, the discussion focused on whether the council had considered how other agencies managed retention of social workers. Children Services was considering the social worker offer at year two and four as it's when most social worker are likely to consider leaving the authority.
- 3.15. The Committee recognised that while progress had been made there was still more work to be done. Changes in work culture had enabled staff and management to consider why they have to follow

a process for the good of the child and why they have to do interventions at specific times and in certain ways however this progress needs to be sustained and developed.

### **Local Children's Safeguarding Board**

- 3.16. The Committee heard from the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board who provided an independent view of the council's improvement journey. The Committee scrutinised the Council's improvement work on children at risk of sexual exploitation, missing children and prevention work around Early Help. Furthermore, the Committee questioned if knowledge was effectively transferred from management to frontline staff. The Committee was pleased to hear that there has been a strong focus on areas of high risk and a shift to a performance management culture. The Committee also discussed the need to look ahead, after improvements had been embedded, to adopt a more financially sustainable way of working.

## **4. Strategic Performance Monitoring**

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Strategic monitoring reports are submitted to the Committee for scrutiny to review progress in delivering the Strategic Plan and to flag key risks.

### **Performance**

- 4.1. The Committee received a report that provided an update on the strategic performance in the second quarter. The Committee challenged a number of areas where the Council was underperforming including why the number of children not getting social care assessments within 45 days was so high, and the reasons for the significant White British education attainment gap and what the Council was doing to address this.
- 4.2. The Committee was informed that as part of the budget setting report at the beginning of 2018, the council adopted a set of eleven new corporate outcomes grouped under three priorities. This was the first step on moving the Council to becoming a much more outcomes-based organisation focused on making a difference to people's lives. In July 2018 the Cabinet adopted a new Strategic Plan based on the new corporate outcomes.
- 4.3. The Committee reviewed the Complaints and Information Governance Annual Report 2017/18. The report set out the Council's activities and performance in response to information

governance matters and information requests. The Committee focused on three key areas of the report; how complaints on housing repairs informed the priorities of Tower Hamlets Homes and the Council, how the council monitored whether complaints led to changes in policy and practices, and why members' enquiries had not been included in the FOI statistics. The Committee highlighted the need to improve response rates and use intelligence from the report to inform development of future scrutiny work programmes.

## 5. Budget & Policy Framework Scrutiny

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The Committee has a mandatory consultation role on all items that are the responsibility of the full Council to agree, including the budget

### **Quarterly budget monitoring report**

- 5.1. The Committee played a key role in scrutinising and challenging the budget for 2018/19 and focused on the delivery of key services, value for money and whether the borough's most vulnerable residents are supported. The Committee raised concerns that the information provided was too high level and that it would be useful to have more detail in the reports to improve transparency. In particular, the Committee requested a directorate analysis to make the presentation of information clearer. The Committee also scrutinised the implications of the spending review and the fair funding review colliding in 2020 and discussed the impact of the lack of provision for deprivation within current Government principles.

### **Budget Scrutiny**

- 5.2. The Committee held three sessions, including a training session and two Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, to consider and challenge the budget proposals.
- 5.3. The budget scrutiny training session was delivered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny with the aim of increasing the Committee's skills and capacity to effectively scrutinise the budget proposals. Training focused on questioning techniques, the impact on residents and whether the budget represents value for money. The Centre for Public Scrutiny also developed key lines of enquiry to assist Committee Members provide effective scrutiny.

- 5.4. The Committee focused on growth and savings proposals. Much of the recommendations by the Committee related to the improvement of the budget process and understanding the full impact on residents. The Committee also focussed on the Capital Programme, how determination of value for money is reached and Housing Revenue Account reserves. The Committee was of the view that equalities and impact assessments needed to be completed sooner as it helped to develop an understanding of the impact on residents and expedited decision-making processes. The Committee discussed the ability of fees and charges alone to impact behaviour changes and felt that if council intends to genuinely change behaviours then a greater role should be given to education campaigns (aligning to fees and charges).
- 5.5. The Committee made a number of recommendations to improve the budget setting process. The Committee wanted the Council to review its modelling for income projections and testing expenditure assumptions to ensure income growth was more accurately reflected. They also recommended that the Council develop an ambitious income generation strategy in collaboration with partners, businesses, residents and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Moreover, the Committee requested that the Council proactively monitor how partners and service providers address inequality and support access to employment and support progression into leadership roles for groups such as black and minority ethnic residents and women. Finally, the Committee recommended that the Council develop its budget and engage the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, businesses and local residents earlier in the year to more effectively scrutinise and contribute to development of budget proposals.

### **Medium Term Financial Strategy Updates**

- 5.6. The Committee received the medium term financial strategy and focussed on potential factors impacting the balanced budget e.g. the business rate retention scheme, income generation strategy and fair funding review. In order for the Committee Members to better scrutinise the Council's budget reduction approach, the Committee requested to see other models of projections on a Council tax increase, income generations, and budget cuts.

## **6. Tracking Recommendations**

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Throughout the year, the Committee reviews progress on the implementation of 'Action Plans' from previous reviews and challenge sessions.

### **Social Value Act**

- 6.1. The Committee was provided with a progress update on the implementation of the Social Value Act Scrutiny Challenge Session action plan. The Challenge Session identified that the development of a Social Value Policy would help provide contractors and residents with a clear definition of expectations and requirements in the commissioning, implementation and evaluation of social value elements. The Committee noted that the council was legally obliged to consider how its procurement might improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of its area and explained that it was taking steps to engage and consult with communities and potential suppliers to inform the format and scale of the Social Value Policy. The Committee was informed that the council was looking at best practice to develop and embed the action plan and that an associated toolkit had been developed to use across the council for services to understand how they could secure the best economic benefits. The Committee questioned whether the Council was confident it could measure the equality impact through the Social Value Act and stressed that it must ensure it took this into consideration.

### **Youth Service Challenge Session**

- 6.2. The Committee received a progress update on the implementation of the Youth Service Scrutiny Challenge Session action plan. The Committee heard that the Council was working on an action-focused approach to implement the recommendations. In the east of the borough there were benefits in outsourcing certain elements of youth provision, as such providers were able to access funding streams not available to the Council. As of 28th August 2018 the Youth Service had all eight of its Youth Hubs opened and the service had successfully recruited new frontline staff, increasing frontline staffing by 23% from when the service was restructured in October 2017, and increasing the ratio of female staff by 12%. All Youth Hubs and Specialist Provision had increased outputs. Contracted provision had 2001 contacts in July; this increased to 2986 in September, whilst in-house provision had 1251 contacts in July; this had increased to 1837 in September. Youth provision needed to be delivered in the most effective fashion as to meet the particular needs of young people in the borough. The development of such provision needed to take into consideration best practice from other boroughs. Consideration was being given to how to work with young people at risk and their families.

- 6.3. The service was looking at how to develop and exploit the full range of services available from in-house and external providers e.g. effective sign posting for young people and providing meaningful interventions. Finally, the Committee heard that strengthening young people's participation and engagement in decision making was a vital aspect of developing the youth provision; including the elections for Young Mayor.

## 7. Petitions, Call-ins and Pre-decision Scrutiny

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- 7.1. Three Mayoral Executive decisions were called in this year. Firstly, the Committee raised concerns about the decision to outsource the Community Equipment Service and felt it would not improve the quality of services that resident received. Additionally, the Committee was of the view it would not achieve the anticipated savings. The Committee considered the Community Equipment Service as a statutory service and one that is not failing. Accordingly, the Committee requested that the decision to outsource be withdrawn and consider alternative options. The Committee suggested that alternative options include plans to improve existing services further and secure better value for money over next two years with a service review to follow. The Committee also requested that more details be provided to outline how NHS partners would contribute funding towards community equipment. In recognition of the need to provide this key service, the Committee recommended that the decisions be referred to the Mayor in Cabinet for reconsideration.
- 7.2. The Committee also called in the decision to close three Local Authority day nurseries. The Committee was of the view that decision would not be in accordance with budget and policy framework, and this would have a disproportionate impact on SEN Children and black and minority ethnic women in the workforce (not reflected within in equality assessment). The Committee questioned whether £1million savings could be realistically achieved from the Early Years budget considering their budget pressures. The Committee also challenged the extent to which the council had considered the voluntary sector taking on the provision as an alternative way and acknowledged that there had been no formal consultation with the voluntary sector. Following a call-in by the OSC, the consultation period was extended to seven weeks

## 8. Scrutiny Lead for Children Services

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### Chair's Intro

- 8.1. *I have attended meetings of the Children's Services Improvement Board and its operational group in order to provide oversight and scrutiny to improve Children's Social Care. The function is further supported when performance reports are routinely shared at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. I am pleased to report that Children's Social Care is making improvements and over the past year there have been three monitoring visits from Ofsted, which have gone well. The service is on course to improve on their Ofsted rating which will provide an assurance that the standard of services received by children, young people and families is good".*
- 8.2. Over the past year, the Scrutiny Lead for Children Services has met with a number of senior officers within Children and Culture to achieve a better insight on areas of opportunity and challenge within the portfolio so as to be able to make an informed decision about where to focus on for the review.
- 8.3. The Scrutiny Lead has worked closely with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure an ongoing focus to Children's Services. Particular focus was placed on exploration of educational aspiration, which began to provide an interesting picture of local education needs. This, alongside reports from monthly surgeries and meetings with local education leaders, helped to inform the focus for the challenge session.

### **Exclusion in Schools Review and Challenge Session**

- 8.4. The review was designed to ensure schools had effective, contextualised behaviour management policies that created inclusive, supportive environments with a reduced rate of fixed term exclusions and managed moves. With this in mind, the review focused on:
- What causes the disparity in the rate of exclusions between schools in Tower Hamlets?
  - Which factors cause young people from certain demographics to be at greater risk of exclusion and what can be done to mitigate this?
  - How do head teachers and governors decide when to exclude and when to propose a managed move?
  - What are the outcomes for students who undertake a managed move, or are in alternative provision?
  - What are the impacts on, and risks to young people when they are excluded, or at risk of exclusion, from school?
  - How do young people and their parents view exclusions, managed moves and alternative provision?

- 8.5. The Challenge Session was held on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019. An update on the outcome of this session will be provided to the Committee in 2019/20.

## 9. Scrutiny Lead for Governance

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### Communications Challenge Session

- 9.1. Scrutiny Lead for Governance chaired a Scrutiny Challenge Session to assess the effectiveness of the Council's communications. Members wanted to review the quality of communications with local residents in order to develop a clear understanding of the issues facing the service. The session was held in January 2019 and was attended by five Members, one co-opted Members and two council officers.
- 9.2. The aim of the challenge session was to ensure that Council communications were promoting increased engagement with residents and stakeholders, and were effectively telling the Tower Hamlets story. It also aimed to ensure that the communications function was appropriately supporting corporate objectives and aimed to identify how elected Members could support this function.
- 9.3. Evidence was collected during the single session, with Members hearing statements from the Divisional Director of Communications at Tower Hamlets council, and the Director of Communications, Culture and Engagement at Hackney council.
- 9.4. The session made a total of nine recommendations on the following themes:
  - Being better at telling the Tower Hamlets story, including working with partners and encouraging staff members to be brand ambassadors for the council
  - Using best practise examples from other boroughs to improve how the council reaches seldom heard groups in the community
  - Providing Members with a weekly update on council activities, which can be sent out to local residents via social media
  - Better utilising the communications function in order to enable residents to engage in the lifecycle of the council's strategic and operational decision making, as well as developing a digital tool for residents to share views and concerns
  - Appointing a named lead Members for resident engagement
  - Ensuring data and intelligence from communications is being used strategically to plan within the council
- 9.5. Following the report being reviewed at the Overview & Scrutiny meeting in March 2019, an action plan to carry forward the recommendations has been developed and has been assigned to relevant stakeholders within the organisation.

- 9.6. The Scrutiny Lead for Governance also played an active role in the Tower Hamlets Partnership Brexit Commission as a Commissioner. The Commission made 24 recommendations which focused on public service, local economy, and civil society. The Brexit Commission was a follow up from the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Brexit which was undertaken in 2017/18.
- 9.7. Additionally, the Scrutiny Lead for Governance took part on the Spitalfields Community Governance review, and the Strengthening Local Democracy review.

## 10. Health Scrutiny Sub-committee

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10.1. The role of the Health Scrutiny Sub Committee (HSSC) is to scrutinise local health services in accordance with the Health and Social Care Act 2001. In summary, the remit of the Sub-committee is:

- Review and scrutinise local health services within the Council's area and make reports and recommendations as necessary.
- Respond to consultation exercises undertaken by an NHS body.
- Questions appropriate officers of local NHS bodies in relation to the policies adopted and the provision of the services.

### Membership

Name	Role
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	Chair
Councillor Eve McQuillan	Vice-Chair
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	Member
Councillor Kyrsten Perry	Member
Councillor Leema Qureshi	Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Member
David Burbidge	Co-Optee

### Domestic Violence

10.2. This item explored key domestic violence issues and challenges in Tower Hamlets. Specifically the HSSC reviewed the provision in place to identify and manage residents at risk of domestic violence, and assessed reporting levels in the borough. Furthermore, it considered 'turn away' rates in Tower Hamlets, the impact universal credit has had on domestic violence and reviewed the provision of domestic violence services for residents with no course to public funds.

### Health and Substance Misuse

10.3. The HOSC scrutinised the relationship between health and substance misuse in Tower Hamlets, reviewed substance misuse prevention services in place in Tower Hamlets, and challenged the quality of current treatment services to support people with alcohol and substance misuse issues.

### Pain management at the Royal London Hospital

10.4. The HSSC examined pain management at the Royal London Hospital. It was found that there are a number of significant issues which include communication issues between the pain team and medical professionals from other departments, communication issues between doctors and patients on the subject of managing

pain (including around safe dosages of various painkillers), delays in receiving pain relief for hospital inpatients, and admin, planning and staffing issues that could impact upon availability of pain relief for hospital inpatients.

### **Residential and Nursing Care Homes and Home Care provision in the borough: Quality and Capacity**

10.5. The HSSC considered the care home and home care markets in the borough, this included the regulatory framework within which these market sectors operate and the role of the Care Quality Commission in maintaining oversight of regulatory compliance. The HSSC looked at a range of quality and capacity issues relevant to the care home and home care market in the borough in order to comment on matters that should be taken into account in the planning of future commissioning arrangements for both care homes and home care provision in the borough.

### **Adult Social Care Charging Impact Assessment**

10.6. Tower Hamlets council introduced a new charging policy for community based adult social care services in October 2017. This item provides an overview of the findings from the recent impact assessment that was carried out to review the impact of the new charging policy for community-based adult social care services on service users and carers. The impact assessment aimed to identify whether there has been a change in use of adult social care services and whether the administration of the policy has been fair and equitable.

### **Health Based Places of Safety in North and East London**

10.7. A Health-Based Place of Safety (HBPoS) is a space where people can be detained under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act and assessed. Patients are typically detained under the Mental Health act under Section 136 by Police, then transported to a Section 136 Suite to be assessed. In 2017, the government formally announced changes to section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (s136 MHA) through the Policing and Crime Act 2017. These came into effect on 11 December 2017. Under these amendments, CCGs must ensure plans for the designation, and appropriate staffing of CCG-commissioned health based places of safety. The HOSC scrutinised the new business case that proposes the 20 existing dedicated HBPoS sites across London are reduced to nine hubs, each with better facilities and immediately available 24/7 staffing on site.

### **Review / Challenge Session**

10.8. The HSSC chose to review type 2 diabetes as it is a major cause of premature mortality with approximately 22,000 people with diabetes dying early each year. Type 2 diabetes is a leading cause of preventable sight loss in people of working age and is a major contributor to kidney failure, heart attack, and stroke. Diabetes is a

significant issue locally in Tower Hamlets. The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is expected to increase and we have a significant number of people at high risk of getting type 2 diabetes

10.9. A number of key local stakeholders took part in the challenge session. This included specialists in diabetes from Barts Health, the clinical GP lead on diabetes from the CCG, and experts from Public Health. Early findings reveal that:

- Lifestyle choices play an important role in impacting on the modifiable risk factors associated with obesity. There are strong interdependencies between ongoing work being carried out by Public Health to tackle obesity and diabetes that needs to be emphasised.
- Tower Hamlets has the highest number of people aged between 18-39 with Type 2 diabetes in London. Engaging with this cohort of people, and intervening at an early stage is crucial in tackling this issue. The current sentiment shared by those interviewed by Tower Hamlets Healthwatch is that it is inevitable they will get diabetes as it is a generational issue in their families and as such they do not live healthier lifestyles to try to avoid it.
- NHS healthchecks play a significant role in early diagnoses and intervention. However, these are not currently working as efficiently and effectively as possible for diabetes diagnosis. Given the specific demographic characteristics of Tower Hamlets, and the current challenge of having a high prevalence of people aged 18-19 with Type 2 diabetes, it would be much more effective if the age range for these healthchecks was lowered below the NHS mandated age range of 40-75. There is also no mechanism in place for following up with those identified as 'pre-diabetic'
- More work needs to be done to proactively engage those identified as being more susceptible to modifiable risk factors. A targeted communications campaign is one possible solution to get this historically resistant group to access services.

## 11. Grants Scrutiny Sub-committee

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### Overview

- 11.1. The Grants Scrutiny Sub-committee (GSSC) forms an important part of the council's overview and scrutiny function and was established to support an objective, fair and transparent and co-ordinated approach to grant funding across the council. Its role is to oversee and scrutinise the process and arrangements for awarding and administering grants and related procurement processes to ensure a strategic approach is followed. In the 2018/19 reporting period the GSSC has sought to ensure that grant funding is aligned with the council's priorities and mayors manifesto pledges outlined below:
- 11.2. The GSSC successfully carries out its role by undertaking the following actions:
- Overseeing the process and arrangements for awarding and administering grants and related procurement processes to ensure a strategic approach;
  - Overseeing the processing arrangements for developing grants criteria and assessment methodology;
  - Overseeing the monitoring, performance management and evaluation arrangements in relation to funded projects; and
  - Ensuring fairness and transparency in the grant awarding process.
- 11.3. In addition, the GSSC aimed to support the council's objective to create a thriving environment for the Third Sector.
- 11.4. In the period ending April 2019 the Sub-committee held seven meetings and focussed on pre-decision scrutiny of the reports being presented to the Grants Determination Sub-committee. Reports include quarterly monitoring updates on grants awarded, an emergency funding application and reports from council officers as requested.

### Membership

Name	Role
Councillor Marc Francis	Chair
Councillor Sufia Alam	Member
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	Member
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	Vice-Chair
Councillor Mohammed Pappu	Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Member
Kim Hayman	Co-Optee
Sue Kenten	Co-Optee

### **Mainstream Grants (MSG) Programme**

11.5. The Sub-committee continued to receive monitoring reports of project delivery in receipt of MSG Programme funds in the reporting period. Following the Sub-committee's support last period of an extension to the MSG programme until March 2019 an additional urgent extension of the fund for a further 6 months was requested. This was due to more in-depth work being required to ensure services and other organisations were prepared for the change to a new funding programme. Members of the Sub-committee agreed to recommend to the Grants Determination Sub-committee to agree to the MSG programme being extended by six months to 30 September 2019.

### **Event Fund Reporting**

11.6. The Sub-committee continued to receive monitoring reports for the Event fund as well as a report on the 2018-19 applications and awards in which an overview of all of the applications received for the financial year was provided. The Sub-committee heard that a total of 60 applications for funding were received with 43 awards made totalling £52,500 and subsequently agreed to recommend both items to the Grants Determination Sub-committee to note.

### **Emergency Funding Application**

11.7. One emergency funding application was received in the reporting period. The application related to Betar Bangla, a community radio station that operates within the borough. The Sub-committee was informed of the applicant's request for a sum of £20,000 to cover an unforeseen increase in their rent costs. Members undertook several lines of enquiry in relation to the rent increase and ultimately agreed to endorse the officer recommendation made to award emergency funding of £10,000 with the intention that the remaining amount sought would be obtained through other funding streams.

### **Historic Buildings Grant**

11.8. Three items relating to the historical buildings grant were brought to the Sub-committee in the reporting period. Two items were applications for new funding and the third a request for a grant payment which had been previously approved to be made. The Sub-committee agreed to recommend approval of both funding applications and the grant payment to the Grant's Determination Committee.

### **A12 Acoustic Barrier**

11.9. The Sub-committee did not endorse one item brought to them in the reporting period. The item related to the A12 Acoustic Barrier project which was seeking to award a grant of £100,000 for the purpose of designing and installing of an acoustic barrier for a section of the A12 to mitigate noise and air pollution. The Sub-committee undertook several lines of enquiry relating to the lack of

evidence that the barrier would improve air quality, potential alternatives to the barrier, and concerns about the value for money of the project. It ultimately felt unable to endorse the project and asked for the project to be halted unless other funding was already committed.

### **European Social Fund Community Employment Programme Updates**

11.10. The Sub-committee received a report to update them on the grants that have been awarded through the European Social Fund (ESF) Community Employment Programme. The report related to the first and second of three rounds that had been launched as part of the programme. The Sub-committee undertook several lines of enquiry relating to the number of organisations applying for the funding, how new organisations could be targeted and unspent funding but ultimately resolved to agree and endorse the recommendations to the Grants Determination Sub-committee

### **Non-UK rough sleepers and complex couples**

11.11. The Sub-committee resolved to agree and endorse the recommendations made to the Grants Determination Sub-committee to approve two grants related to supporting rough sleepers in Tower Hamlets. This funding would target non EEA rough sleepers as this group are more likely to stay with friends, go to a shelter or remain on the streets after experiencing illness. Following several lines of enquiry from sub-committee members it was confirmed that further research would be undertaken into how the council can work with complex co-dependent couples who sleep rough.

## 12. Housing Scrutiny Sub-committee

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### Overview

- 12.1. The Housing Scrutiny Sub-committee (HSSC) scrutinises housing matters impacting on residents of the borough. This includes providing overview and scrutinising the council's decisions or actions pertaining to housing matters and the discharge of housing functions. It reviews the performance of service providers holding them to account (as appropriate), supporting and advising on service improvements making evidence-based recommendations.
- 12.2. The HSSC also considers housing related matters brought to its attention by Ward Councillors, resident associations or members of the general public, addressing these issues as appropriate through Sub-committee meetings and/or the Chair's directive whilst ensuring the framework for this engagement and co-operation continues to be strengthened.

### Membership

Name	Role
Councillor Dipa Das	Chair
Councillor Dan Tomlinson	Member
Councillor Muhammad HM Harun	Member
Councillor Shad Chowdhury	Member
Councillor Shah Ameen	Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Member
Moshin Hamim	Co-opted Member, leasehold representative
Anne Ambrose	Co-opted Member, tenant representative

- 12.3. In delivering its theme based work programme, a number of issues were discussed, services improvements proposed and recommendations put forward for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 12.4. The Sub-committee identified a total of 5 theme based scrutiny priorities to be delivered across 5 meetings (one of which was an extraordinary meeting), which included:

### Current Housing Supply

- 12.5. The Sub-committee explored measures to speed up the re-let of void housing stock, the empty property surcharge, collective actions to tackle social housing fraud and illegal subletting, and suggested strengthening uptake of housing moves to tackle under occupation and requested to feed into the review of the allocations policy raising concerns on the target set for band 3 applicants not in housing need. The Sub-committee reviewed proposals put forward in the social housing green paper, which was only a small step towards delivering more social homes feeding into the consultation process.

### **Quality Housing**

12.6. The Sub-committee received an update on fire safety improvements of housing stock through precautions, resident engagement, remediation works, enforcement actions and implementation of recommendations from the fire safety scrutiny review and Hackitt review of building regulations. The Sub-committee requested two additional briefing notes one on remedial actions of unsafe Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding, one for registered providers stock and access to funding and the other on enforcement actions and improvement notices of private sector high rises informed through a risk assessment. In addition, the Sub-committee received an information item on the delivery of statutory functions, legislative changes and acts to improve conditions in the private rented sector, including scrutiny's role in assisting through lobbying for further legislative and planning changes.

### **Affordability/Finance**

12.7. The Sub-committee reviewed Cabinet approved budget proposals, priorities and performance, comprising of Housing Revenue Account, general fund expenditure, external funds secured and the delivery of pan-London initiatives. The Sub-committee requested that future budget-setting timescales allow for sub-committee's to feed into the process at an earlier stage. Following a delayed report of Tower Hamlets Home strategic review, the Sub-committee requested Mayoral consent to review and feed into recommendations prior to this going out to THH residents. Following a review of service charges for leaseholders (60-70% of stock), the Sub-committee explored current debt positions (£2m) arrears and financial inclusion/management advice available, identifying complaints and satisfactions as areas for improvements.

### **Housing needs**

12.8. The Sub-committee considered the delivery of collective actions by the Council and social landlords to identify and support residents affected by welfare reforms and the roll out of universal credit, through intelligence, engagement, advice, assistance and referrals. It provided focused attention on the prevention of homelessness and priorities to tackle rough sleeping including through implementation of the homelessness reduction HRA and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2018 – 2023. It explored the current challenges faced by the Council including increased access to affordable and sustainable housing options, tackling and eliminating rough sleeping by 2027, reducing numbers in temporary accommodation, and strengthening partnership working to support children, families, young people and vulnerable adults. The Sub-committee considered an update on sheltered housing and landlord migration onto the intensive housing management model, reviewing the benefits and successes of the tenant activity pot to date. The Sub-committee requested an explanation from non-engaging landlords and for Tenants' Activity Pot participation information by ethnic group.

## **Planning and infrastructure / future demand**

12.9. In light of a growing population, the Sub-committee considered how the Councils infrastructure delivery plan proposes to meet demands, the challenges and funding gaps and also considered whether the water infrastructure (Thames Water) was sufficient to meet the needs of existing and new housing developments. It considered the changes and implications of the national planning policy framework and the build out review in increasing housing supply, deliverability, increasing diversity and a new committee to provide challenge.

## **Standing items**

12.10. The Sub-committee considered strategic plan priorities and challenged underperformance requesting an update on mayoral pledges. It considered the performance of social landlords inviting an underperforming social landlord to attend a meeting following a review of trend information.

## **Review**

12.11. The Sub-committee undertook a scrutiny review of housing open spaces, the objective of which is to improve, health and wellbeing, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through housing open spaces.

12.12. Evidence suggests that contact with safe, green spaces reduce health inequalities, increases community activity and residents' satisfaction, responds to climate change - heat waves, flooding and CO2 emissions, improves air and noise quality, enhances biodiversity and encourages active transport. Deprived areas suffer from the poorest health and have significantly less green space than wealthier areas, participation in natural environments are also the lowest amongst BME communities and those with poor socio economic status.

12.13. The review comprised of three evidence collection sessions exploring good practices in urban open space management, tackling health inequalities and open space strategies, priorities, plans and approaches to managing open spaces to support delivery of the objectives and how they work with social landlords, learning from community greening projects, friends groups and environmental organisations and exploring funding opportunities to deliver sustainable improvements. .

12.14. In response to the issues identified through the scrutiny review, proposed recommendations included the production of a GIS map of housing open spaces, assessing the accessibility of housing open spaces in areas of open space deficiencies, co-designing and transforming open spaces to deliver a balance between competing priorities and supporting social landlords to adopt good practices to achieve quality open spaces, including the delivery of projects and training for staff and residents on community greening and growing to

improve health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes for residents through housing open spaces.

## 13. Looking Ahead

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13.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee participated in an away day (16 March 2019), which led by CfPS. Going forward, the Committee established that they would like to:

- Improve the communication channels between the OSC and its sub committees.
- Consider new methods to engage non-executive councillors e.g. deputy councillors.
- Be clear and explicit about the intent and impact expectations
- Develop individual and team behaviours around scrutiny culture
- Consider making smarter pre meeting focussing to ensure successful meetings
- Improve questioning techniques and style – themes, KLE’s share workload, room and space.
- Smaller but more detailed work programme should focus on key corporate issues

### How to get involved

13.2. Residents are crucial in challenging service delivery and helping to shape improvements. There are four main ways residents can get involved with Tower Hamlet’s overview and scrutiny processes:

- **Attending Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings** (or one of its sub-committees): these are all public meetings and therefore open to any local resident who wishes to attend. The Committee meetings are now live cast through the Council website.
- **Giving evidence to the Committee or one of its sub-committees**, or a review or challenge session established by one of these committees, on any issue or matter that appears on an agenda or that is being scrutinised
- **Applying to join the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or one of its sub-committees** as a co-opted member when a vacancy arises
- **Proposing topics** for scrutiny by one of the committees. The Council actively seeks greater public participation in proposing topics for scrutiny through the council’s website. These topics will be considered alongside proposals from councillors to develop the work programme for the next municipal year

