


<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">10 September 2019</p>	
<p><b>Report of:</b> Mark Baigent, Interim Divisional Director, Housing and Regeneration</p>	<p><b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted</p>
<p><b>Draft Scrutiny Report - Improving health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces</b></p>	

<p><b>Executive Summary</b></p>
<p>This report submits the report and recommendations of the Housing Open Spaces scrutiny review, and the action plan for implementation.</p> <p>The review explored a range of programmes and projects that the borough is engaged in to transform housing open spaces. It was evident that there was strong commitment to support resident engagement and community led change. The review looked at open space strategies and policies, management and horticulture practices, community greening and growing priorities and the benefits they bring to communities. It was evident that good practices were available in the management and maintenance of open spaces, and there was an increasing demand for community greening and growing.</p> <p>However, the review highlighted issues concerning missing repository of housing open space information, issues of accessibility, ensuring a consistency of approach in implementing policy, and community greening, growing, project sustainability and training.</p> <p>This report therefore makes a number of practical recommendations for the council and its partners to implement which comprises of a GIS map of open spaces, sampling accessibility of spaces, implementation of policy and delivery of competing priorities, development of a good practice guide to quality open spaces, a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of projects and a community greening and growing development programme for staff and residents.</p>

<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p>The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee is recommended to:</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve the report, recommendations and action plan for consideration by the Council and Mayor in Cabinet.</li> </ol>

## **1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 The Council's constitution requires the Executive to respond to recommendations from the scrutiny sub-committees. The action plan within this report outlines the Executive response to the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review on Improving health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 To take no action. This is not recommended as the report outlines work undertaken by Councillors and officers to identify areas of improvement. Further, the actions are strategic, measurable and attainable and a timetable for delivering the recommendations has been agreed by the Directorate and is attached in appendix 2.

## **3. DETAILS OF REPORT**

- 3.1 As part of its work programme for 2018/19, the former Housing Scrutiny Sub-committee and the Tower Hamlets Residents Panel carried out a joint scrutiny review of Housing Open Spaces to improve health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces. This was Chaired by Cllr Dipa Das, Chair of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee. The Scrutiny Review took the form of three evidence gathering sessions and a fourth session to agree recommendations. All of which took place between February 2019 and May 2019.
- 3.2 Tower Hamlets is a thriving borough faced with numerous challenges. It is the fastest growing and second most densely populated local authority in the UK. It is faced with huge inequalities, deprivation and poverty. It has the 4th highest proportion social housing stock in London and over 30,000 homes, 72 per cent of the borough's social housing stock, are managed by registered providers operating in the borough. In 2018, 79% of Tower Hamlets residents were happy with their area as a place to, this is 10 percentage points lower than the England average for less deprived areas. Publicly accessible open space in Tower Hamlets remains low (0.89 hectares per 1,000 residents - less than the borough standard of 1.2 hectares per 1,000 residents) compared to other London boroughs; this is far below the national standard. Working with social landlords to improve open space is one of the best opportunities to improve healthy environments for residents who would most benefit.
- 3.3 Research carried by Public Health England suggests that those living in wealthier areas have greater access to green space and its benefits than those living in deprived areas. The report suggests that good quality green

space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes, reduce health inequalities foster greater community cohesion and reduced social isolation. It stresses the vital role Local authority's play in enhancing and improving access to green spaces working with partners

- 3.2 In delivering the joint scrutiny review, members of the committee agreed to review good practices and policies in housing open space management. This included identifying opportunity for partnership working, sharing of good practices, promoting an increase in community benefits, accreditations and awards, and increasing access to resources to improve the quality of housing open spaces.

### **Outcomes**

- 3.3 The desired outcomes of the joint scrutiny review comprised of:
- Establishing good practice in the management of open spaces
  - Encouraging all social housing providers to adopt good practices in order to maximise the contribution these spaces can make to improving health and wellbeing, social, economic and environmental benefits and improvements to air quality in the borough
  - The Council working with THHF to establish a Borough wide Housing Estate Best (use of) Open Space competition.
  - Achieve an increase in the number of housing open Spaces accredited by the Green Flag Awards
  - Investigate the appetite for outdoor gyms on open spaces
  - Identify funding opportunities that residents, Tenants and Residents Associations and social housing providers can bid for

### **Core Questions**

- 3.4 To achieve the outcomes, the joint scrutiny review was underpinned by 4 key questions:
- (1) How much green space in Tower Hamlets do social housing providers' manage? (GIS Map as outcome)
  - (2) What informs social housing providers' approach to managing open spaces?
  - (3) How do open space strategies / policies:
    - Improve accessibility and overcome challenges including ASB?
    - Improve resident's health and wellbeing?
    - Provide economic and environmental benefits (incl. air quality)?

- Provide community cohesion, ownership and development opportunities?
- (4) What funding and partnership opportunities are accessed / available for the use of open spaces to deliver the above benefits?

3.5 The review explored a range of programmes and projects that the borough is engaged in to transform Housing Open Spaces. It was evident that there was strong commitment to support resident engagement and community led change. The review looked at open space strategies and policies, management and horticulture practices, community greening and growing priorities and the benefits they bring to communities. It was evident that good practices were available in the management and maintenance of open spaces, and there was an increasing demand for community greening and growing.

3.6 However, the review highlighted issues concerning missing repository of housing open space information, issues of accessibility, ensuring a consistency of approach in implementing policy, and community greening, growing, project sustainability and training.

3.7 This report therefore makes five recommendations for the council and its partners to implement which comprises of a GIS map of open spaces, sampling accessibility of spaces, implementation of policy and delivery of competing priorities, development of a good practice guide to quality open spaces, a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of projects and a community greening and growing development programme for staff and residents. The report with recommendations and action plan is attached at appendix 1. This comprises of the following:

Policy	
R1	Drawing on intelligence, the Council produces an up to date GIS map of housing open spaces, and encourage THHF to <u>sample</u> and assess the accessibility of sites in wards with open space deficiencies identifying any improvement options.
R2	The Council to report back to the committee on new developments and their compliance with planning policies (below); and the Council to prioritise and encourage underutilised spaces to be co-designed and transformed to deliver a balance between competing priorities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy D.SG3: Health impact assessments</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy D.DH8: Amenity</li> <li>• Policy S.SH1: Delivering high quality design</li> <li>• Policy D.DH2: Attractive streets, spaces and public realm</li> <li>• Policy S.CF1: Supporting community facilities</li> <li>• Policy D.ES3: Urban greening and biodiversity</li> <li>• Policy D.OWS3: Open space and green grid networks</li> <li>• Policy D.DH6: Tall buildings</li> <li>• Policy D.ES2: Air quality</li> </ul>
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### Management and Service Improvements

R3	<p>The Council to encourage and support THHF to develop a good practice guide to achieve quality open spaces – to deliver health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes. Comprising of priorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green communities, roofs and balconies and support (incl. grants, tools and revenue funding (where possible)) community growing</li> <li>• Improving access, encouraging usage and multiuse facilities on open spaces</li> <li>• Eco friendly and environmentally grounds maintenance and intelligence based planting</li> <li>• An online platform (webpage) for community greening, (either via THHF or by each social landlord ) – including information, advice and guidance, policies, procedures, duties, health and safety, licenses and map of community growing projects established and new sites identified</li> </ul>
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### Communications, Engagement and Partnership working

R4	<p>The Tower Hamlets Housing Forum’s Community Involvement Network supported by the Council to facilitate the delivery of projects that encourage community greening, growing and quality open spaces that deliver wide benefits.</p>
R5	<p>The THHF Community Involvement Network to widen the scope of its ‘food growing and managing a food garden training session’ to a broader development programme to cover community greening and growing (available to both residents and staff) comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Green flag awards for housing</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intelligence based planting, enhancing biodiversity and green recycling</li> <li>• Benefits of friends groups</li> <li>• Community greening and growing - policies, procedures, duties, health and safety, and licenses</li> <li>• THHF good practice guide and sharing of good practices</li> <li>• Supporting a cottage industry and resident led social enterprises</li> <li>• Local employment initiatives in horticulture</li> </ul>
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#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty (as set out in the Equality Act 2010) aims to embed equality considerations into the day to day work of public bodies, so that they tackle discrimination and inequality and contribute to making society fairer.
- 4.2 The recommendations and actions set out in this review seek to reduce inequalities including health inequalities, foster greater community cohesion, reduce social isolation and support social value, economic and environmental benefits through housing open spaces. It stresses the vital role Local authority's play in enhancing and improving access to open spaces working with partners to implement recommendations on key equality considerations.

#### **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
- 5.2 The recommendations in scrutiny review are made as part of the joint scrutiny panels role in helping to secure continuous improvement for the Council, as required under its Best Value duty.

- 5.3 Implementation of the recommendations will deliver environmental improvements for the borough, including bio diversity enhancements.
- 5.4 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this scrutiny report and action plan.
- 5.5 There are no direct crime and disorder reduction implications arising from the report or recommendations. However it is expected that open space transformation and community greening and growing will design out anti-social behavior.

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 There are financial implications emanating from the implementation of the five recommendations made within this report.
- 6.2 Recommendation one relating to the production of GIS maps will have a resourcing implication. It is anticipated that a post will need to be created for data collection. This post will be funded from the HRA and the anticipated cost of £38k will be met within existing budget allocations.
- 6.3 Funds have been identified from within existing budgets to meet recommendation two which relates to communities driving change programmes and the council's new build programme should this recommendation be approved.
- 6.4 Recommendations three to five will be funded through the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum who are able to access external funding to provide the projects. Any additional funding would need to be met from within the HRA. These projects will not progress unless all funding is sourced in advance.

## **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 7.1 The Council is required by Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements which ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with that obligation Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive, as appropriate, in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for the Committee to be asked to comment on the matters set out in the report. Other Scrutiny Panels may be established by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel which include the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee.

The report seeks the approval of the action plan which sets out the Council's response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review into improving

health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces.

- 7.2 The recommendations in the plan are capable of being carried out within the Council's powers. The Council is able to exercise its general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to implement the action plan for the benefit of the authority, its area and persons resident or present in its area.
- 7.3 The Council is required when exercising its functions to comply with the duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, namely to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Paragraph 4.2 of the report refers to various actions in the review that address equality considerations.
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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- NONE.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 –Housing Open Spaces Scrutiny Review - Draft Report
- Appendix A – Housing Open Spaces Scrutiny Review Action Plan


### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

#### **List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

- NONE

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