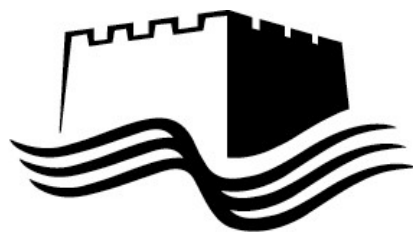


# **Report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on Strengthening Local Community Leadership**



**TOWER HAMLETS**

**London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
February 2010**

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## **Acknowledgments**

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The Working Group would like to thank all the officers and residents that supported this review. The views and perspectives of all that were involved have been fundamental in shaping the final recommendations of this report.

### **Working Group Chair:**

Councillor Ann Jackson

### **Working Group Members:**

Councillor Helal Abbas

Councillor Alibor Choudhury

Councillor Muhammad Abdullah Salique

Councillor Dual Uddin

Councillor Rupert Eckhardt

### **Co-opted Member:**

Hasan Mueenuddin (Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Muslim Community Representative)

### **London Borough of Tower Hamlets:**

Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive

Shazia Hussain, Director, Tower Hamlets Partnership

John Williams – Service Head Democratic Services

Michael Keating – Service Head Scrutiny & Equalities

Kevin Kewin – Deputy Service Head Strategy & Performance

Afazul Hoque – Scrutiny Policy Manager

Lorna Hughes – Senior LAP Manager

David Sommerfield – Scrutiny & Equalities Support Officer

Shamima Begum – Trainee Scrutiny & Equalities

Keiko Okawa Smith

### **External**

Nico Heller – The Democracy School

### **Local Residents & Groups**

#### **The Working Group also received contributions from the following:**

LAP Steering Group Members

Ocean Somali Community Organisation (OSCA)

Students and Staff from Central Foundation Girls School

Older People's Reference Group

Tower Hamlets Local Involvement Network Members

## **Chair's Foreword**

**Cllr Ann Jackson  
Scrutiny Lead, One Tower Hamlets**

## **Recommendations**

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The Working Group recommendations focus on three areas requiring consideration and action from the Council, Tower Hamlets Partnership and local community leaders. The recommendations are presented as a useful starting point for improving local community leadership to support the aim of achieving One Tower Hamlets.

### **DEVELOPING NEW MODEL OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

#### **Recommendation 1**

That the Council develops a programme to raise awareness amongst Members, residents and other stakeholders of the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) process.

#### **Recommendation 2**

That the Council further develops the Performance Digest report to enable a more comprehensive understanding of residents' concerns at both a borough wide and LAP level.

#### **Recommendation 3**

That the Partnership develops local scrutiny with a problem-solving focus through LAP Steering Groups and links this in with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **Recommendation 4**

That the Council develops a programme to improve Councillors' links with third sector and partner organisations, focusing on enhancing their ward level leadership role.

#### **Recommendation 5**

That the Council continues to develop programmes to support Community Leaders at all level including targeted work with minority and new communities.

#### **Recommendation 6**

That the Council develops Member Champion roles on key areas such as the equalities strands to ensure those areas are promoted at strategic and local level.

#### **Recommendation 7**

That the Council develops a comprehensive Induction Programme for new Councillors including allocating Senior Officers to each Councillor to help them navigate around the Council.

## **RESIDENT PARTICIPATION**

### **Recommendation 8**

That the Council develops innovative communication mechanisms such as use of social media and developing councillors website to highlight their work including how local residents can work with Councillors to shape their area.

### **Recommendation 9**

That the Council rolls out a programme of formal meetings at different community locations within the borough.

### **Recommendation 10**

That the Council reviews the way petitions are managed and develops a more comprehensive system for receiving and responding to petitions.

## **ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP**

### **Recommendation 11**

That the Partnership reviews how the Local Area Partnership (LAP) structures involve Councillors more effectively by utilising their democratic mandate and relationships with their constituents, for example helping to accessing 'hard to reach' sections of the community and communicating with residents in more open ways. .

### **Recommendation 12**

That the Partnership reviews the way work programmes and agendas are being set at LAP Steering Groups to ensure it has a more local focus and encourages other residents to attend.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the Council undertakes a feasibility study to explore allocating ward budgets to local Councillors.

## Introduction

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1. To meet the challenges facing Tower Hamlets we know that the Council alone cannot achieve the outcomes which residents, Councillors and partners desire. At the same time the local authority has a clear community leadership role to play. The challenge is to do this in partnership with other agencies and organisations. Recent proposals from central government are challenging us to think about what we might need to do to strengthen community leadership and participation.
2. This review aimed to address these challenges and in particular how the process of Scrutiny can be a key driver to make this happen. Residents must be able to engage with the Council and the democratic process to tell us what outcomes they want.
3. Scrutiny reviews always aspire to focus on issues of concern to residents. The actions arising often fall outside the remit of the Council and need partner engagement even from those who may not be under any duty through the Local Area Agreement. To obtain the right outcomes for residents, we need to strengthen our wider partnerships and explore how our scrutiny powers can help us do this. Residents are not overly concerned with who is responsible for what, they want to see effective local services helping to make the borough a great place to live. The community leadership of Members has the potential to facilitate this precisely because of their democratic mandate. Realising this potential will be important for all concerned.
4. Our experience of the Health Scrutiny Panel and the relationships we have established shows how good joint working has the potential to benefit local residents through accelerating improvements in health. Last year's Child Poverty Scrutiny Review developed and tested a community leadership model which explored the relationship between members and their constituents. It also reflected on how to extract the kind of local information that helps make this happen. Combining good quality local information from statutory agencies and that which Members glean from their ward work has the potential to deliver a more dynamic problem solving approach to what often appear to be intractable issues. Thinking through the different relationships and how we use the information we have are the fundamental issues at the heart of this review.
5. In addressing these issues, the review therefore set out to do the following:
  - Develop Member awareness of national drivers for strengthening the leadership role of Councillors;
  - Consider the response to the Strengthening Local Democracy consultation

- paper focusing on strengthening scrutiny of partnerships;
- Develop proposals for strengthening local democracy and external scrutiny in the wider place shaping contest
- Test whether the CCfA proposal will be useful to Members in identifying local problems and developing local solutions;
- Explore the use of CCfA with residents to ensure it will work for them;
- Identify support for Members in exercising their community leadership role and in implementing CCfA.

6. The group agreed the following timetable for the review:

Introductory review meeting (November 2009)

- Agree scoping document
- Background – National & Local Drivers
- Local Democracy in Tower Hamlets
- Leading through Partnership
- Response to Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation

Councillor Call for Action (November 2009)

- Background to CCfA
- Performance Digest
- CCfA Members Workshop

CCfA Workshop with local residents (December 2009)

- The role of Community Leaders
- Community Leadership in Action

Discussion so far (January 2010)

- Issues arising from meetings with local residents
- Draft recommendations

Final Meeting (February 2010)

- Draft Report



## Background

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### National context

7. The *Strengthening Local Democracy* consultation paper<sup>1</sup> explores the role and powers of local councillors, focusing on councils as key drivers of localised improvements by strengthening their mandate to act on behalf of residents. The principle is that 'citizens have the right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and their communities'. Strengthening local democracy could happen in the following five ways:
  - Greater power to councils to scrutinise the spending and decisions of local service providers;
  - Removing barriers to councils using existing powers;
  - Enhancing powers of councils to deal with climate change;
  - Exploring powers and responsibilities of sub-regional structures
  - Developing relationship between central and local government
8. The paper sees councils as the local point of accountability achieved by giving elected leaders greater responsibility on behalf of constituents to scrutinise and influence decisions made by all spenders of public money. As already articulated, health scrutiny is well established in Tower Hamlets. The challenge is to build similar relationships with other partners. This review will use our local response to the consultation to work out how best to do this.
9. Set against a back-drop of declining voter turnout and with citizens feeling that Councillors do not represent their views, the White Paper, *Communities in Control: real people, real power*<sup>2</sup> aspires to shift power, influence and responsibility into communities and individuals. If services do not meet the highest standards, citizens should be able to complain and seek redress and local authorities need to have clear systems of redress in place. The proposed new duty to respond to petitions gives petitioners the power to influence local level issues. It proposes that where a response to a petition is not satisfactory, it can be debated in full council. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Police and Justice Act 2006 introduced powers allowing Members to call for debate and discussion around local level concerns through the CCfA.
10. Designed to sit alongside existing mechanisms and be used when all other attempts at resolution have failed the Council has developed a local model proposed to allow Members to use local level information to discuss concerns in a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localdemocracyconsultation>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol>

problem solving capacity. This proposal incorporates the use of information obtained through members enquires, corporate complaints, Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and petitions.

11. The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) framework places a key role on Community Leaders shaping their local area and working in partnership to do so. In particular it envisages the role of non-executive members to become more critical as community champions and offers them the opportunity to feed in local perceptions of existing services and outstanding issues. CAA also offers scrutiny a range of opportunities to develop its role of examining the work of local service providers and helping to deliver the priorities set out in the Community Plan and measured through the delivery of the LAA. For example scrutiny agenda can investigate any significant shortcomings that CAA might find.
12. The Councillors' Commission report published in 2007 highlighted a number of underlying principles outlining the importance of the relationship between citizens and state, a key facet of community leadership. These are:
  1. Local authorities are key to promoting local democratic engagement;
  2. Promoting a sense of efficacy is key to better engagement;
  3. Councillors are most effective when they have similar life experiences to their constituents;
  4. Key to effective local representation is the relationship between councillors and their constituents;
  5. Being a Councillor should be made less daunting and be better supported.

### **Local context**

13. Tower Hamlets has a track record on exploring difficult issues with local residents. Positive comments in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (2008) on the role of Overview and Scrutiny highlighted its strength in pro-active leadership. Members are fundamental to this. The 2008/09 Annual Residents' Survey showed that 46% of residents felt they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This is a decrease of 2% on the previous year (48%) and a decrease of 8% from 2005/06 (54%). In contrast, the Place Survey undertaken by Ipsos MORI shows a decrease of 9% between 2006/07 (47%) and 2008/09 (35.7%).
14. Tower Hamlets compares favourably on this indicator to London (35%) and national (28.9%). In considering the Place Survey results it needs to be borne in mind the relatively low response rate and the likelihood of response bias. Despite this the Working Group felt strongly that this can be improved by listening to residents and using the information we obtain from them to find local solutions.

The importance of participatory decision making is a key concern for Members to ensure residents feel empowered and take control of shaping their local area.

15. Members' community leadership role is strengthened by their representative composition. Tower Hamlets bucks the national trend by continuing to attract younger people as Councillors - 86% of Councillors are under 50 - reflecting the borough's younger than average population. 63% of Councillors are from BME backgrounds, including the Leader of the Council. Many work either full or part-time. Their experiences therefore echo their constituents. They are keen to find the right solutions to local problems and involve residents in the democratic process to do so.
16. This review has built on the review undertaken in 2006 which considered the role of councillors in the Tower Hamlets Partnership and specifically focused on how to enhance democratic accountability. Among its conclusions the review illustrated how councillors can access harder to reach sections of the community and talk to their constituents in a more straightforward way than professional officers. These attributes are important elements of community leadership. This is now embedded in the new Partnership structure with councillors given a greater status. They have a greater role on LAP Steering Groups and Cabinet Members co-chair the Partnership's Community Plan Delivery Groups (CPDG). The Partnership is well established and brings together residents, Members, business, voluntary and community organisations and statutory public services. However, the Working Group noted that the communication between LAPs and CPDGs is not as effective as it could be and there is a need to strengthen this to ensure local needs and priorities are addressed and also agree local activities and projects that will deliver these local priorities.

### **One Tower Hamlets Consideration**

17. Last year's Scrutiny Review on Child Poverty developed and tested a community leadership model. Members used the model to develop a better understanding of the experiences of local residents and used the information to influence policy and service development. Members identified residents who collectively might represent the diversity of Tower Hamlets and interviewed them about their experiences of child poverty. Becoming known as the One Tower Hamlets Interviews, this model has not been developed or tested elsewhere. Members have found it a useful way to identify local needs and link resident experiences and concerns with service development. A number of recommendations were made based on these interviews.

18. The Child Poverty review highlighted the important role Community Leaders can play in developing equality and cohesion in bringing forward areas of local concerns. This review provided the opportunity to support the development of Community Leaders through consideration of new areas to enhance the role of non-executive councillors.
19. The experience from the Members Diversity and Equalities Working Group also highlights how Members have a key role in finding solutions to potentially difficult and contentious issues. A key element of the borough's Community Plan theme of One Tower Hamlets is to strengthen community leadership and this review allowed Members to have a discussion with officers and local residents on how this could be developed.
20. The Equality Framework for Local Government <sup>3</sup>places leadership and partnership at the heart of their assessment. The leadership of our Members has been fundamental in our progress on diversity and equality making Tower Hamlets making the borough one of the best performing authorities in the country.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9499336>

## Findings

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### DEVELOPING A NEW MODEL OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

21. A vibrant local democracy should encompass many different types of community leadership. In supporting Councillors to play their part it would be useful to define what community leadership means in relation to the role of citizens and the role of elected representatives and tackle any questions about a conflict between participative and representative democracy.
22. While community leadership has always been part of what councils have done, the Local Government Act 2000 enshrined the community leadership role in law for the first time. The legislation has given councils a new power 'to do anything' to promote the wellbeing of their area as a whole – encouraging councils to look beyond immediate service delivery responsibilities to the wider economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas – and requires councils to develop a strategy for their community with local people and partner organisations.
23. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) outlines 8 characteristics of effective community leadership:
  - Listening to and involving communities
  - Building vision and direction
  - Making things happen
  - Standing up for communities
  - Empowering local communities
  - Accountability to communities
  - Using community resources effectively
24. The role of elected Members is unique because of its democratic mandate. This gives weight to their decisions and the accountability they can demand in making them – as well as the judgment that can be made of them by their electors at the ballot box. Non-executive Members in particular have opportunities to provide ward level leadership as they are likely to have more time to do this than their Cabinet colleagues. There are different roles and purposes of community leadership and they can be both complementary and at odds with each other. It would be useful for the role of councillors to be defined in relation to other types of community leadership. This could help recognise that councillors can play a unique role in facilitating dialogue between local people and service providers. This would help to shape Member learning and development opportunities in order to inform the development of activities around increasing participation and engagement of local people.

## Councillor Call for Action

25. Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (LGPIH) Act 2007 includes provisions for CCfA that came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. This means the Council is now under statutory obligation to provide Members the opportunity to refer to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) any local government matter where other methods of resolution have been exhausted. In its aspiration to empower local councillors to respond more effectively to the needs of their communities, the CCfA fits closely with our realisation of the Community Plan, particularly its overarching theme of 'One Tower Hamlets'. CCfA offers a key opportunity to coordinate activity across the three objectives of One Tower Hamlets: reducing inequality, strengthening cohesion, and strengthening community leadership. Linked closely to Comprehensive Area Assessment, CCfA will also be a key tool in building a sense of people and place, and helping to deliver better outcomes for residents.
26. To realise these objectives the Council has attempted to devise a workable local solution within the wider context of how residents can raise their concerns and further enhance how we 'involve' them more widely. This gives the opportunity to:
  - Improve how residents can get a say in what's happening particularly about what's not working
  - Refine and refresh systems for raising concerns to improve their operation and ensure that they actually produce better results
  - Improve the information provided to councillors about what is not working and the major issues arising from this in order to use their community leadership as part of the problem-solving process
27. This local model has been designed to avoid the creation of an overly bureaucratic process. Crucially success will also be dependent on the willingness of officers and Members to adopt a problem-solving approach that recognises their different perspectives. Getting this right would enable us to have a more sophisticated way of tackling problems and recognising that finding sustainable solutions is often complex. Last year this approach was tested with the Members' Diversity and Equality Working Group to explore controversial issues including Preventing Violent Extremism, Homophobic Hate Crime and working with new residents. This approach proved to be more energising and led to improved engagement of Members with the Police on PVE, increased understanding about working with new communities and saw them taking a more active role in LGBT issues.
28. Guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny suggests that the best authorities will use this opportunity to look more generally at all the ways in which Councillors are empowered to resolve problems local to their ward, with CCfA as a last resort once all other processes have been exhausted. At the same time we need to be mindful that this 'last resort' is itself relative to the effectiveness of how services respond overall.

29. In larger terms, this necessitates clarifying what all the processes for raising concerns are, how they relate to each other, and making sure they are as effective as possible. The aspiration is for a robust process to exist as an entirety, with issues that would benefit from extra attention from scrutiny being able to rise to the surface, whilst those issues which are best dealt with through others means being signposted accordingly. Consideration of CCfA therefore needs to be set in this context. The production of good quality management information from which Councillors can work in a problem-solving capacity to understand and solve important issues for the community is crucial to ensure that CCfA does not end up as something used all the time. Not only could this expend a considerable amount of additional energy it also could undermine what services should be doing all the time to put right what is not working.
30. This will enhance the power of CCfA as a last resort if no feasible solution can be found. The Ward Member would be a clear champion for an issue raised directly from their ward, where all established grievance procedures have failed to solve the problem. The link with the LAP Steering Groups is important because it could potentially create a more direct response to local needs. This potential strength would ensure that a proper all-embracing attempt has been made to deal with issues. In turn this would ensure that the CCfA process is used to address those issues which are truly intractable and highlight their significance more strongly. In considering the CCfA model the Working Group highlighted the need to develop appropriate links between LAPs and OSC to avoid duplication and more importantly the really intractable issues are prioritised for problem solving. In that respect it was noted that the ward councillors have a key role in championing these at both OSC and LAPs. The CCfA proposal is attached in Appendix 1.
31. Members and residents understanding and engagement of the CCfA process are crucial in developing the forums for discussion of difficult issues and also creating the environment for finding solutions to those difficult problems. Members noted that there have been on-going discussion through an Officer Group at the Council around the development of the CCfA process and this has been agreed by the Council's Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There has also been discussion held with the Partnership Delivery Groups to seek their comments on the CCfA process. This process was also discussed at a recent LAP Steering Group Members Conference.
32. The Group noted in general partners and local residents welcomed the opportunity to work with community leaders to find solutions to difficult problems. The CCfA workshop Members held at the second meeting also highlighted how there is no easy solutions to difficult problems. Effective community leadership can facilitate discussions between the various stakeholders to minimise impact on individuals and from this perhaps begin to explore different approaches. This is itself not easy and will not provide instantaneous answers. Members therefore felt a key issue would be managing expectations about how CCfA will work and believed it was therefore important to raise awareness amongst Members, local residents and officers at the Council and partner organisations.

**Recommendation 1** That the Council develops a programme to raise awareness amongst Members, residents and other stakeholders of the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) process.

33. The Working Group considered a draft Performance Digest report at their second meeting. This contained data from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2009/10 disaggregated by theme, locality and equality strands. The idea is that this should allow the identification of trends and key issues to aid the development of solutions and appropriate action.
34. In collecting the data a number of issues have been highlighted which includes changes to both the collection of data and alignment of system to ensure mapping of issues by the same theme. There is on-going work within the Council to address this. Similar concerns exist about the collection of information about FOI requests and petitions.
35. The initial analysis of the available data showed that more than a quarter of all Stage 1 complaints were generated in LAP 1. More than half these complaints concerned housing management and repairs. This was higher than the housing complaints generated in other LAPs. At the same time Members' Enquiries about these issues were fairly evenly distributed across the LAPs. The Working Group agreed that the Performance Digest could be a very useful tool for identifying the really intangible local problems and agreed that this needed to be further developed. Discussion was also held at the LAP Conference in January 2010 around the usefulness of the Performance Digest for LAP Steering Group and there was genuine appetite amongst Steering Group Members for this sort of information to problem solve locally. The Working Group has suggested that the Performance Digest report presented to LAPs should include comments from OSC on areas of concerns and possible solutions which would need to be explored locally.

**Recommendation 2** That the Council further develops the Performance Digest report to enable a more comprehensive understanding of residents' concerns at both a borough wide and LAP level.

36. The Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation Paper proposes greater powers for councils to scrutinise local service providers. In its response the Council welcomed this as scrutiny reviews already focused on the overall wellbeing of local people in the area. In considering the role of LAP Steering Groups there is an enormous amount of local leadership which is not being used enough to understand local concerns and find local solutions. In line with the proposals for



CCfA and concerns being raised the Working Group recommends that the Partnership develops local scrutiny with problem-solving focus role for the LAP Steering Groups. This will need to link with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure work is not being duplicated and there is greater accountability at local and strategic level. LAP level scrutiny will also provide Steering Group Members a clear place shaping and service improvement role.

**Recommendation 3**

That the Partnership develops local scrutiny with a problem-solving focus through LAP Steering Groups and links this in with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

37. The Council has recently agreed a revised Third Sector Strategy which aims to create an environment for a thriving voluntary and community sector. It is estimated that there are over 2,500 active community organisations in the borough who receive around £55m of council funding annually. The Strategy has identified five key areas in which the Council can make a real difference to the Third Sector.
38. The Working Group noted that an important attribute of third sector organisations is that they can reach communities that traditional public sector services providers may not easily be able to access. Furthermore, as local service providers they also have access to a wide range of local information which can support community leaders in their understanding of their area. One of the key themes from the Third Sector Strategy is the development of the voice and representation role of the sector. Councillors as local representatives can play a crucial role in the development of the voice of third sector as they have key roles within the Council as well as external organisations.
39. The policy shift towards ward councillors having a greater place shaping role has been further emphasised in the Strengthening Local Democracy Consultation paper. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Area Assessment also places a greater role on community leaders to provide local leadership in improving services for residents. In light of these developments the Working Group has suggested that further work is needed to support councillors improve their links and work with the third sector and partner organisations if they are truly to understand local needs and ensure services are fully responsive. The development of the Council for Voluntary Sector offers a real opportunity to co-ordinate this piece of work in a more manageable way.

**Recommendation 4**

That the Council develops a programme to improve Councillors' links with third sector and partner organisations, focusing on enhancing their ward level leadership role.

40. The diversity of councillors in Tower Hamlets strengthens their community leadership role. This is particularly important for developing a cohesive community and increasing the number of residents that feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This is a key indicator in the borough's local Annual Residents Survey.
41. The Working Group welcomed some of the work the Council has already done to improve the diversity of our community leaders. This includes the award winning Women into Public Life programme to attract local women from all backgrounds to get involved in public life. The programme includes a dedicated website providing information and support for local women interested in playing a public role in their community. More recently the Council ran a programme for Future Women Councillors with 17 local women who developed their knowledge and skills to feel confident to stand as a councillor. During the programme many of the participants played an active part in the LAPs and joined scrutiny reviews as co-opted Members.
42. This year the Council has launched the 'Community Leadership Skills Programme' designed to help individuals develop, enhance and grow their community leadership skills. This has been advertised widely and will offer an opportunity to under-represented communities to come forward and be more involved in local democracy. The Tower Hamlets Partnership is also currently looking to develop a Community Leadership programme for Somali residents and discussions have been held with the current Mayor, who is believed to be the first Somali Mayor nationally.
43. The Working Group were keen to ensure that the Council continues developing mechanisms to support community leaders and in particular ensure targeted work is undertaken with under-represented or new communities in the borough. This could include using citizenship ceremonies to identify emerging communities and also to recruit residents into these programmes.

**Recommendation 5**

That the Council continues to develop programmes to support Community Leaders at all level including targeted work with minority and new communities.

44. Using a team of local government peers the Equality Framework for Local Government assesses local authorities against five key performance areas one of which is around place shaping and leadership. The Council was assessed in January 2010 and was rated 'Excellent'. The team commented that that equality and diversity are intertwined with scrutiny and understood to drive improvements

and efficient spend. This provides a good base to strengthen Members' role in reducing inequalities within the borough. The Working Group noted that there are some informal Member Champion roles that already exist for older people and local heritage.

45. The Working Group recommends this be further developed through Member Champion roles for all the equality strands. This will allow Members to champion specific causes for certain communities. The diversity of the borough and the challenges posed by the outlook of reduced public sector funding highlights the potential importance of these roles. The experience of Member Diversity and Equality Group could be drawn upon and the Member Champions could be selected from this group. The Civic Mayor can also have a central role in championing community cohesion in the borough and provide the profile these issues deserve.

#### **Recommendation 6**

That the Council develops Member Champion roles on key areas such as the equalities strands to ensure those areas are promoted at strategic and local level.

46. During the last local elections 32 out of the 51 councillors were elected new to the Council. These new Members had to develop their understanding of the organisation to ensure they are able to fulfil their community leadership role all in a very short space time to meet the high expectations of their local constituents. The Council has been providing an extensive Induction Programme for new councillors over the years. However, local government has changed considerably over the last few years with a greater emphasis on community leaders place shaping their local area. A number of external inspections of local authorities have placed community leadership at the forefront of their assessment, highlighting the importance of supporting the development of community leaders.
47. The Working Group therefore felt it would be useful to develop a comprehensive induction programme for new councillors which should be tested with existing Members. It was suggested a specific training around providing information and guidance would enable Members to better understand how they can support their constituents. Furthermore, Members training sessions should follow an action learning principle to make them interesting and interactive. In supporting new councillors the Working Group argued that providing a 'buddy system' would enable new councillors to understand organisational pressures as well as provide an easier way to navigate the organisation.

**Recommendation 7**

That the Council develops a comprehensive Induction Programme for new Councillors including allocating Senior Officers to each Councillor to help them navigate around the Council.

**RESIDENT PARTICIPATION**

48. The work of local councillors is already promoted through East End Life and the Council website extensively. Twice a year East End Life publishes all Councillors contact and surgery details. Last year the paper also ran a programme of 'meet your councillor', which focused on individual councillors providing details of their work as well as some personal information to enable residents to better understand their role. The Council has also developed the 'cotchin' with councillors' programme allowing young people to talk to Councillors about their concerns.
49. During the focus group a number of residents commented that they were not aware of who their local councillors were and what they were doing. At the same time many people also said there had been some really good work by local councillors and sometime people did not hear about this. The Working Group welcomed the use of the East End Life and the Council website but felt that the Council should explore more innovative methods to highlight work of local councillors and how local people can work with them to influence decisions affecting their area. This could include use of social media and developing councillors website pages which provides more information about their work and their policies which can help residents understand how these have helped shape their local area. It was also noted that an effective CCfA process would help raise Members profile.

**Recommendation 8**

That the Council develops innovative communication mechanisms such as use of social media and developing councillors website to highlight their work including how local residents can work with Councillors to shape their area.

50. The Working Group noted that generally Full Council meetings are very well attended by local residents but this is not the case with most of the other Committees including Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Communities in Control White Paper also encourages councils to improve participation in the local democratic process including proposals for moving meetings outside the Town Hall.

51. The Council has already undertaken some feasibility work around developing a programme of meetings outside the Town Hall. There are associated costs which would need to be considered in the development, but it is hoped that this would be offset by increasing resident engagement in the decision making process. Meetings at external venues would need to be advertised widely through East End Life and the Council website as well as within the vicinity of the venue to ensure maximum attendance by local residents.
52. The Working Group therefore recommends that the Council introduces a programme a formal meetings at different locations within the borough. These should be meetings that local residents are interested in and the process for being involved in these meetings should be publicised to residents. There is also a need to ensure these meetings are co-ordinated with local LAP meetings and they do not clash.

**Recommendation 9**

That the Council rolls out a programme of formal meetings at different community locations within the borough.

53. Signing a petition is one way for citizens to express their concerns. Some local authorities already have well developed processes for responding to petitions and approach them as an opportunity to listen to the community. The Government is currently undertaking a consultation on the duty to respond to petitions and incorporates proposals from Communities in Control to ensure petitions lead to actions and local authorities have a facility for e-petitions.
54. The number of petitions being received by the Council has been much lower than the previous years. The reasons for this are unclear but could be due to petitions relating to social housing now going to relevant housing partners or they are not being properly recorded as current procedure requires. Improving the management of the petitions the Council would strengthen the effectiveness of the Performance Digest and also enable a better response to the issues raised.

**Recommendation 10**

That the Council reviews the way petitions are managed and develops a more comprehensive system for receiving and responding to petitions.

**ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP**

55. The Tower Hamlets Partnership is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Tower Hamlets. It brings together a wide range of public, private, community and

voluntary organisations to achieve the shared vision for the borough. There are eight Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) which provide a formal framework through which residents are involved with all their key partners. They provide a mechanism for engaging with local people and form an important aspect of local accountability and service improvement.

56. To ensure its effectiveness and improvement the Partnership regularly reviews its performance and its structures. Following a comprehensive review of the governance of the Partnership in 2008 a new structure was introduced. Each LAP is now co-chaired by a ward councillor and a local resident. The resident members are appointed through a formal application process and try to ensure that LAP Members reflect the diversity of their area.
57. All throughout the review both Members and local residents expressed concerns around the new LAP structures and role of the various stakeholders. The key concern is that the Partnership is not fully utilising the resource available through the LAPs and this needed to be maximised if we are going to improve local leadership. There were a number of positives highlighted which included the Participatory Budget process which attracted a huge number of local residents and allowed local residents to be involved in decision making.
58. Officers and Members present at the first meeting agreed that LAP structures were not being fully utilised by Members and the communication between them and LAP Managers needed to improve. This also impacted upon the LAP Steering Group as it lacked Member level engagement. The Working Group therefore recommends that this be reviewed to ensure councillors play a more pro-active role in the LAPs.

#### **Recommendation 11**

That the Partnership reviews how the Local Area Partnership (LAP) structures involve Councillors more effectively by utilising their democratic mandate and relationships with their constituents, for example helping to access 'hard to reach' sections of the community and communicating with residents in more open ways. .

59. LAP Steering Group Members and Members that attended the focus group highlighted that LAP agendas did not have sufficient local focus and were too full of consultation and update reports. This did not allow Steering Group Members to raise local issues. There are also issues about limited access to LAP meetings for residents who are not Steering Group Members. The Scrutiny Session last year on Dangerous Dogs was highlighted as an example of an issue that attracted huge number of local residents due to local concern. The Partnership used to arrange these meetings in the past on local issues and it was felt that this needed to be re-

visited. In improving access to LAPs it will help develop local intelligence and better understand the wide range of local priorities.

**Recommendation 12**

That the Partnership reviews the way work programmes and agendas are being set at LAP Steering Groups to ensure it has a more local focus and encourages other residents to attend.

60. The Participatory Budgeting process allowed both Members and residents to be involved in local decision making. The Working Group discussed whether developing a ward budget for councillors would enable Members as community leaders to identify difficult issues within a ward which requires a small investment to resolve. This could also be used to improve community cohesion through Members organising local meetings or events when any incidents takes place.
61. The Working Group heard that Westminster Council had a Ward Budget scheme that gave each ward £100,000 per year and local councillors were able to agree how this money is spent. This is similar to Tower Hamlets Participatory Budget but with more power given to local councillors. The Working Group were not keen to replace the Participatory Budget but felt the Council should explore whether a smaller grant could be given to each ward of approximately £30k to allocate within their ward.
62. The Working Group held detailed discussion around ensuring there was transparency, accountability and value for money in such a programme. The potential cuts in public finance over the next few years will pose challenges in finding adequate resources to finance this, but at the same time it offers opportunities for local councillors to support important local projects. They have therefore recommended that the Council undertakes a feasibility study of how such a scheme would work and what procedures would need to be put in place to ensure it is successful and transparent.

**Recommendation 13**

That the Council undertakes a feasibility study to explore allocating ward budgets to local Councillors.

## Conclusion

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63. This review offered an opportunity to consider how local community leadership could be strengthened to respond to national policy change. The review is very timely considering the upcoming local elections and a new administration. The Council has already undertaken a lot of work to support the development of community leaders and ensuring our leadership reflects our community.
64. There are a number of initiatives in place to allow local residents to take a more active role in their community such as Council Committees, LAP structures and other forums such as Interfaith Forum, the LGBT Community Forum or Pan Disability Panel.
65. The Working Group has made a number of recommendations in three key areas. Firstly, the changing role of community leaders has allowed the Council to consider how it supports local councillors. The proposals developed for Councillor Call for Action offers a real opportunity for councillors and residents to take an active role in problem solving. It also proposes to utilise more effectively the information the Council already has and to use this to understand and address concerns of local residents. The Working Group recognises this will need resources to support Members and residents to understand and develop the process further. Furthermore, this provides an opportunity for Members to facilitate discussions around difficult issues and help manage residents' expectations.
66. There are some very practical issues the Council could do to take democracy to the local community and improve the working relationship between Members and their constituents. The Partnership in Tower Hamlets is very well regarded both locally and nationally. The Working Group has made a number of recommendations to build on this and ensure we utilise the resource available to us.
67. The Working Group hope the recommendations of this review will support the development of local community leaders to enable the borough to become more cohesive where opportunities are equally available for all residents and the aspiration of One Tower Hamlets is realised.



# CCfA Model – Appendix 1

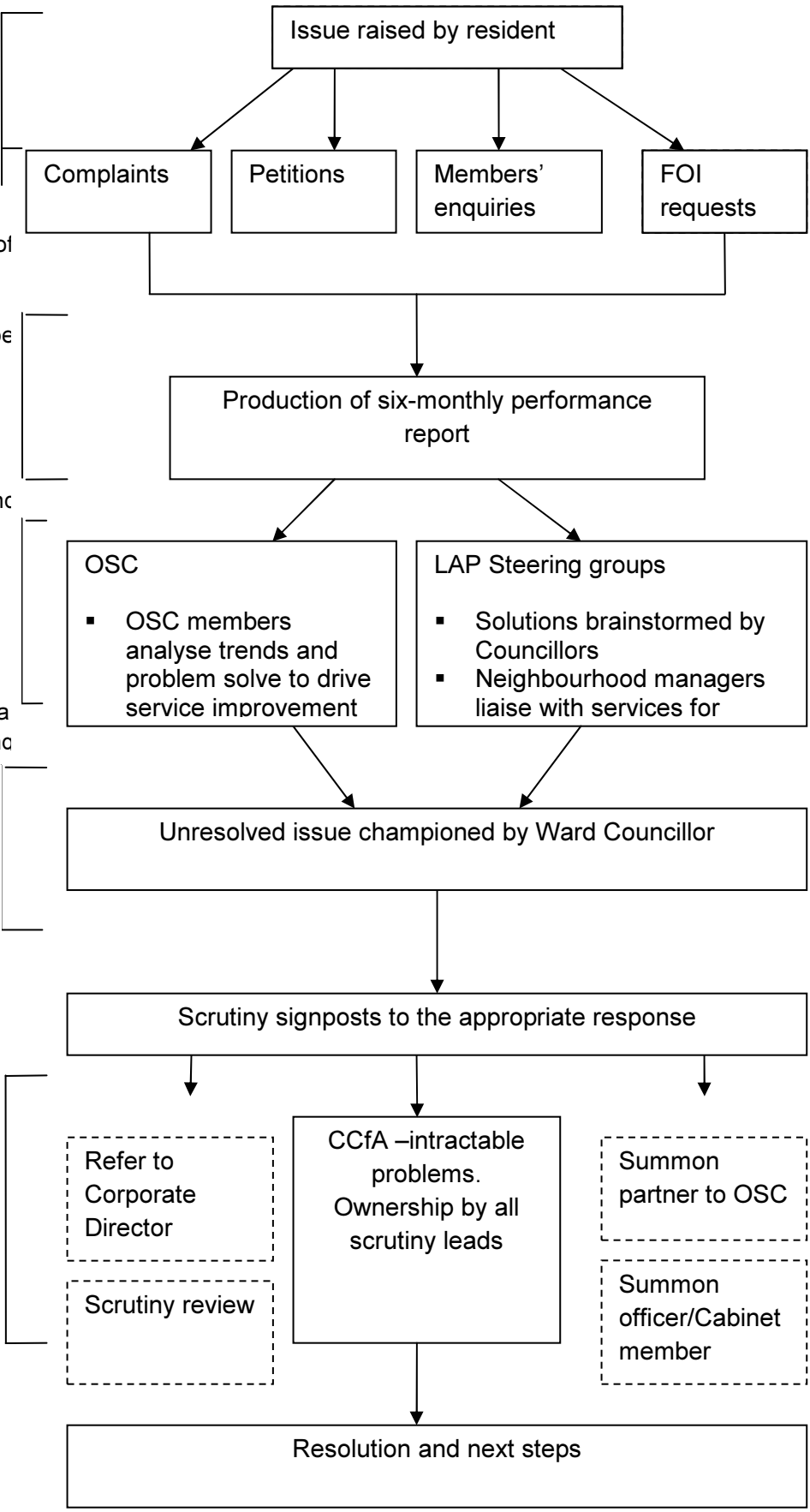
Standard grievance systems – robust, clear processes

Report compiles and makes sense of what these systems are telling us. To be used for corporate management and by

LAP groups and OSC tackle unresolved issues at Borough and ward level, involving Councillors in a problem-solving

At this stage becomes a CCfA – a persistent ward-based problem which has exhausted existing

CCfA goes onto OSC agenda and committee signposts to appropriate response



The Ward Councillor should direct the resident to the appropriate grievance mechanism, and monitor progress. Councillor to refer to checklist at this stage for guidance.

OSC members monitor and evaluate report, working in a problem-solving capacity to spot patterns and find solutions

Councillors attend their relevant LAP group and encourage residents to do so, brainstorm solution to problem at ward level

Scrutiny policy team work with Councillors to go through checklist to ensure issue has been discussed elsewhere. Issue then put onto agenda for OSC.

Councillor works with OSC members to find appropriate response. Cllr informs residents involved of progress and discusses ideas with them

Cllr ensures residents are satisfied with solution and keeps monitoring

## Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

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To find out more about Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets please contact:

Scrutiny Policy Team  
Tower Hamlets Council  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Mulberry Place  
5 Clove Crescent  
London E14 2BG

Telephone: 020 7364 4636

E-mail: [scrutiny@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Web: [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/scrutiny)