


<p>Non Executive Decision of the: GPC</p> <p>25 June 2019</p>	
<p>Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Strengthening Local Democracy</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy
Wards affected	All wards
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	<p>Priority 3: A dynamic outcomes-based Council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough.</p> <p>Outcome 9: People say we are open and transparent putting residents at the heart of everything we do.</p>

Executive Summary

This report follows requests from Councillors to review how the community and/or Councillors engage in local democracy. Over the last four months the Strengthening Local Democracy task and finish group met to review evidence from Councillors, council officers, external partners and other local authorities. This work supports the Council's transparency, accountability, community engagement and cohesion priorities as outlined in the Strategic Plan, Tower Hamlets Plan and Transparency Protocol – A Transparent Mayor, an Open Council.

The review has identified areas of best practice and makes recommendations to continue to strengthen and improve local democracy in Tower Hamlets.

Recommendations:

The GPC is recommended to:

1. Adopt the Councillor Support Framework attached as Appendix 3 to this report.
2. To agree that the Corporate Director, Governance retain oversight for implementation of the Framework and is to report back to the General Purposes Committee on progress every six months.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This report follows requests from the Mayor to review how the community and/or Councillors engage in local democracy. Options were considered to undertake this piece of work by outsourcing to a third party or set up a task and finish group consisting of Councillors and an independent Chair. After consideration it was decided to undertake the review in-house, effectively and efficiently meeting the Council's agenda on pace and delivery, and looking for some quick wins. A more in-depth review has not been ruled out.
- 1.2 Over the last four months the Strengthening Local Democracy task and finish group met to review evidence from Councillors, council officers, external partners and other local authorities. This work supports the Council's transparency, accountability, community engagement and cohesion priorities as outlined in the Strategic Plan, Tower Hamlets Plan and Transparency Protocol – A Transparent Mayor, an Open Council.
- 1.3 The review has identified areas of best practice and made recommendations to build upon this, strengthening and improving local democracy in Tower Hamlets.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 To do nothing. This is not recommended as the proposed framework sets out a number of proposals to enable ward councillors to improve engagement at a local level.
- 2.2 To commission a wider independent governance review.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 At the May 2018 Council Elections, 45 Councillors were elected to represent Tower Hamlets' 20 wards. More than half of these Councillors (27) were new. All Councillors have been through a comprehensive Induction Programme which included mandatory and non-mandatory sessions designed to support them in carrying out their role effectively. There were 1-2-1 sessions available to all Councillors to develop Personal Development Plans aimed at supporting continuous learning and development to enable Councillors to undertake their role effectively. 16 Councillors took up this opportunity.
- 3.2 There has been a range of approaches to how Ward Councillors have been fulfilling their local community leadership role with a lot of time and effort spent by Councillors working closely with their communities. In September 2018, the Corporate Leadership Team agreed that a framework be developed to support Ward Councillors with their broader engagement activities. This would enable Councillors to play their role in the community beyond the Town Hall and ensure consistent support from officers. This work supports the Council's

transparency, accountability, community engagement and cohesion priorities as outlined in the Strategic Plan, Tower Hamlets Plan and Transparency Protocol – A Transparent Mayor, an Open Council.

- 3.3 The Annual Residents Survey 2018 shows that 73% of respondents feel the Council keeps residents informed about what they are doing, 62% feel the Council involves residents in decision making and 59% feel the Council listens to concerns of local residents. 79% of respondents are satisfied with their area as a place to live which is slightly higher than the national average. This piece of work provides an opportunity to strengthen democratic engagement and hence improve satisfaction with the Council and local area.
- 3.4 In order to look at these areas, a task and finish group was established to review Strengthening Local Democracy. Chaired by Asmat Hussain Corporate Director of Governance, and made up of officers from Democratic Services, Strategy and Policy, Communications and Legal, the group met with a range of council officers and external partners.
- 3.5 Details of the evidence sessions held by the task and finish group can be found at appendix 1, this included officers from across the Council presenting on a variety of topics including:
 - Education and Partnership
 - Youth Service
 - Intelligence and Performance
 - Community Safety
 - Housing
 - Planning
 - Licensing
 - Consultation and Community Engagement
 - The Mayor's Office
 - Community Funding
 - Overview and Scrutiny
 - Spitalfields and Bangla Town and Weavers Community Governance Review
 - Electoral Services
- 3.6 In addition, the group heard from external partners from:
 - Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
 - Metropolitan Police Service
 - Tower Hamlets CCG
 - Kirklees Council (about their Democracy Commission)
- 3.7 Engagement from stakeholders was positive. They all favourably recognised the role and experience of Ward Councillors and were keen to build upon the valuable work already taking place.
- 3.8 Alongside this, the group undertook its own research and benchmarking of other local authorities. This included reviewing alternative forms of community

engagement such as local ward forums, neighbourhood planning forums and ward budgets, and the lessons learned elsewhere.

- 3.9 A questionnaire for all Councillors exploring both their engagement with their communities as well as the support they receive in their role was undertaken between February and March. This questioned the current processes including what works well and what Councillors would like to see more of. Feedback from this process is set out in Appendix 2. Key messages included:
- ensure Councillors are kept informed of events and activities happening in their ward
 - Councillors want to be empowered and enabled to bring communities together
 - Ward walkabouts could be developed further
 - Training sessions are very helpful, and additional areas for training were suggested
 - Requests for information such as lists of residents' associations, tenant management groups and housing associations at ward level.
- 3.10 The outcome of the task and finish group's work is the proposed framework for Councillors (attached at Appendix 3) alongside the following recommendations:
- a. That Divisional Directors and Corporate Directors engage with relevant Ward Councillors at an early stage with undertaking activities in their wards.
 - b. That the council supports a greater place shaping role for ward councillors
 - c. That the Member's Bulletin is reviewed and used as a key engagement tool for sharing information with Councillors.
 - d. That Councillors are supported to work with schools, Children's Services and the Youth Service.
 - e. That appropriate data and training is provided for Councillors.
 - f. That further support is provided for Councillors to engage them with the Planning, Housing, Community Safety and Licensing processes.
 - g. That Councillors are signposted to work with partners.
 - h. That the Overview and Scrutiny process is strengthened.
- 3.11 The next steps will require the adoption of the Framework and move to the implementation stage.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposals will support Ward Councillors enabling them to better engage with all sectors of their communities. This will have a positive equalities impact as existing and new arrangements are strengthened and improved.

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.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from the content of this report. If the findings of the recommendation give rise to actions which have financial consequences, officers will then be obliged to seek appropriate approval through the Council's financial approval process.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The purpose of this report is for the benefit of the community, its area and persons resident and present in this area. Under the Localism Act 2011, the general power of competence relates to this power to benefit the local community under s.1(4)(c). The recommendations of this report therefore satisfy the aim of the Act to give greater powers to local councils, communities and individuals through enabling ward councillors to improve engagement on a local level.
- 7.2 Regarding the proposed outcomes of 3.10 (e) GDPR provisions will need to be taken into consideration regarding the data and training that is to be provided to councillors.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - List of Task and Finish Group sessions and attendees
- Appendix 2 – Councillor Questionnaire and PDP results
- Appendix 3 - Councillor Support Framework

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

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Appendix 1 - List of Task and Finish Group sessions and attendees

<p>Session 1 Wednesday 30 January</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people and schools • Councillor PDP • Ask the Mayor • Locality based data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teresa Heaney, Head of Corporate PMO • Christine McInnes, Divisional Director Education and Partnership • Sandjea-Marie Green, Head of Youth Service • Annick Batimba, Programme Development Manager • Thorsten Dryer, Head of Intelligence and Performance • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Beverley McKenzie, Head of Member Services • Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
<p>Session 2 Monday 11 February</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety • Housing • Planning • Licensing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Baigent, Interim Divisional Director, Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability • Charles Griggs, Head of Community Safety • David Williams, Deputy Divisional Director, Planning and Building Control • David Tolley, Head of Trading Standards and Environmental Health • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
<p>Session 3 Monday 25 February</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirklees Council Democracy Commission • Community Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy, Kirklees Council • Oduwa Idehen, Senior Strategy and Policy Manager • Kashim Chowdhury, Strategy and Policy Manager – Public Consultation and Engagement • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Beverley McKenzie, Head of Member Services • Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Katy McGinity, Strategy and Policy Officer
<p>Session 4 Monday 5 March</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Community Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Freeman, Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy Manager • David Courcoux, Head of Mayor's Office

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mayor's Office • Benchmarking of Local Ward Budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katherine Ball, Senior Accountant • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
Session 5 Monday 11 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners - Community Involvement Network (RSL-led) • Mayoral Model, referendum (Mark Norman) • Member L&D training plan - 2019-2020 from PDP • Graphical timeline of LAPs, funding, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mo Ali, Community Involvement Network, THHF • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
Session 6 Thursday 21 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and Scrutiny • Community Governance Review • Councillor Survey results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharon Godman, Divisional Director strategy, policy and performance • Steve Morton, Senior Strategy & Policy Manager • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications • Beverley McKenzie, Head of Member Services • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
Session 7 Friday 5 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors and Housing • Tower Hamlets Housing Forum • Metropolitan Police Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yasmin Ali, Project Director – Town Hall • Sandra Fawcett, Chair of THHF Executive, THHF • Luke May, Assistant Inspector, Metropolitan Police • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
Session 8 Thursday 25 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group • Community Engagement • Review of Sessions 1-7 • Review of timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safa Moghul, Engagement Manager – GPs, TH CCG • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer

<p>Session 9 Monday 13 May</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer
<p>Session 10 Tuesday 14 May</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPC Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer • Matthew Mannion, Head of Committee Services • Mark Norman, Legal Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer • Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy • Clare Matthews, Strategy and Policy Officer