

Cabinet 27 November 2019	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director, Place	Classification: Unrestricted
Scrutiny Report - Improving health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces	

Lead Member	Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing
Originating Officer(s)	Abidah Kamali, Strategy and Policy Manager
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Forward Plan Notice Published	30/09/2019
Reason for Key Decision	Scrutiny recommendations - Impact on Wards
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in

Executive Summary

This report submits the report and recommendations of the Housing Open Spaces scrutiny review, and the action plan for implementation. 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 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 acknowledged good practices in the management and maintenance of open spaces, and the increasing demand for community greening and growing.

The review highlighted issues concerning a missing repository of housing open space information, issues of accessibility, ensuring a consistency of approach in implementing policy, bio diversity training for residents and horticulture staff, and the sustainability of community greening, growing projects. 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, delivering a balance between competing priorities, development of a good practice guide to achieve quality open spaces, a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of projects and a community greening and growing development programme for staff and residents.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Consider the scrutiny report of Housing Open Spaces (to improve health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces) and agree the action plan in response to the report recommendations.

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 THE 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 of 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 reduce social isolation. It stresses the vital role Local authority's play in enhancing and improving access to green spaces working with partners
- 3.4 In delivering the joint scrutiny review, members of the joint scrutiny panel 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

- 3.5 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.
 - Promote 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

- 3.6 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?

3.7 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 for 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. Good practices were available in the management and maintenance of open spaces, and there was an increasing demand for community greening and growing.

3.8 However, the review highlighted issues concerning a missing repository of housing open space information, issues of accessibility, ensuring a consistency of approach in implementing policy, bio diversity training for residents and horticulture staff, and the sustainability of community greening, growing projects.

3.9 The Joint Scrutiny Panel received evidence from the Council, local and pan-London organisations in setting out good practice in working with housing open spaces to green communities, and provide quality open spaces, including through new development. This included the identification of benefits to both existing and new communities and habitats and the delivery of a number of improvement projects through community engagement and participation.

3.10 The Council presented evidence of its Watts Grove development amongst others where through stakeholder engagement sites identified were being transformed to provide new homes and quality open spaces. Sites identified by the Council for housing (to support delivery of 2,000 new Council homes

(Mayoral pledge)) are often inaccessible, riddled with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), with formal / informal car parking, where green / play space needs enhancement. Through resident engagement the Council housebuilding programme empowers residents to be active in the design of schemes. This includes enhancing open space / green space sites through intelligent design and planting, and working with the ASB preventions officer to design out ASB. The joint panel acknowledged the Council's approach to design and stakeholder engagement and requested that the Council prioritise and encourage underutilised spaces to be co-designed and transformed to deliver a balance between competing priorities.

3.11 The joint panel agreed that in a borough with a growing population, c.19,000+ people on the housing register, existing open space deficiencies and underutilised open spaces, delivering a balance between competing priorities to achieve quality open spaces is crucial (Recommendation 2b).

3.12 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, delivering a balance between 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 is attached at Appendix 1; the supporting action plan is attached at Appendix 2. Recommendations comprise 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.
R2a	The Council to report back to the committee on new developments and their compliance with planning policies (below): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy D.SG3: Health impact assessments • Policy D.DH8: Amenity • Policy S.SH1: Delivering high quality design • Policy D.DH2: Attractive streets, spaces and public realm • Policy S.CF1: Supporting community facilities • Policy D.ES3: Urban greening and biodiversity • Policy D.OWS3: Open space and green grid networks

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy D.DH6: Tall buildings • Policy D.ES2: Air quality
R2b	The Council to prioritise and encourage underutilised spaces to be co-designed and transformed to deliver a balance between competing priorities.
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"> • Green communities, roofs and balconies and support (incl. grants, tools and revenue funding (where possible)) community growing • Improving access, encouraging usage and multiuse facilities on open spaces • Eco friendly and environmentally grounds maintenance and intelligence based planting • 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
Communications, Engagement and Partnership working	
R4	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.
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"> • The Green flag awards for housing • Intelligence based planting, enhancing biodiversity and green recycling • Benefits of friends groups • Community greening and growing - policies, procedures, duties, health and safety, and licenses • THHF good practice guide and sharing of good practices

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting a cottage industry and resident led social enterprises• Local employment initiatives in horticulture |
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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.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 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 behaviour.

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 and will require funding of £38k. This recommendation should, therefore, only be approved on the identification of additional budgetary provision. If growth is required, this will need the approval of Cabinet through the annual budget setting process.
- 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.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 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.].

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 –Housing Open Spaces Scrutiny Review - Draft Report
- Appendix 2 – Housing Open Spaces Scrutiny Review Action Plan

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

- NONE.

Officer contact details for documents:

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