

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.32 P.M. ON MONDAY, 27 JANUARY 2020

ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE  
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG

**Members Present:**

Councillor James King (Chair)

Councillor Sufia Alam (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Kahar Chowdhury

Councillor Dipa Das

Councillor Marc Francis

Councillor Tarik Khan

Councillor Bex White

Councillor Andrew Wood

- Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
- Scrutiny Lead for Health & Adults
- Scrutiny Lead for Housing & Regeneration
- Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance
- Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment

**Co-opted Members Present:**

Halima Islam

James Wilson

- Co-Optee
- Co-Optee

**Apologies:**

Councillor Eve McQuillan

Mayor John Biggs

Councillor Sirajul Islam

- (Bethnal Green Ward)
- (Tower Hamlets Executive Mayor)
- (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing)

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillor David Edgar

Councillor Peter Golds

- (Cabinet Member for Environment)

**Officers Present:**

Asmat Hussain

- (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer)
- (Senior Strategy & Policy Manager - Corporate)
- (Head of Information Governance)
- (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
- Waste Mobilisation Advisor
- (Divisional Director, Public Realm)
- (Corporate Director, Health, Adults &

Adam Boey

Ruth Dowden

Afazul Hoque

Mark Griffin

Dan Jones

Denise Radley

Karen Swift

Community)

- Divisional Director Housing & Regeneration
- (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

David Knight

## 1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

The following Councillor declared an interest that must be registered in Agenda Item 9

- Councillor Bex. White;

## 2. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

### RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

## 3. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

## 4. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

Noted

## 5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

## 6. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

### 6.1 Customer Services

Asmat Hussain (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer); and Ruth Dowden (Head of Information Governance) gave a presentation to the Committee regarding how the Council is responding to complaints and requests for information. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that at the September 2019 meeting it was agreed that OSC would consider the item once the Information Governance Toolkit had been published to assist in the development of relevant themes into the Work Programme.

- Acknowledged the importance to continue to have a culture of learning from complaints with a constant exchange between providers and users.
- Noted that the Council's Corporate and Departmental Leadership Teams track outcomes to ensure a consistency in addressing those issues that have been identified.
- Confirmed the Council takes very seriously any recommendations received from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to put things right.
- Noted that the Council ensures the right processes are in place to sustain improvement.
- Noted that the LGO is running a pilot from January, 2020 to June, 2020 with the intention to provide a mutually beneficial exercise that (i) develops a closer liaison; (ii) allows for engagement with the Corporate Leadership Team; (iii) provides training for staff on key areas; (iv) will allow the LGO to reach the relevant officers faster; and (v) identify the current issues so that service quality can be properly addressed;
- Noted that the LGO is confident that LBTH properly addresses any issues raised.
- Noted the LGO provides guidance on the levels of redress through its web site.
- Was informed dealing with a customer complaint takes a great deal of tact, and ignoring it can have a serious impact on the reputation of LBTH; and
- Was advised that handling a customer complaint positively takes listening and understanding of the facts. Prompt resolutions are expected, and a follow-up to ensure that a complainant is properly satisfied.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED** to maintain a watching brief over how the Council is responding to complaints and requests for information.

## 6.2 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Determination of Outcome

Karen Swift the Divisional Director Housing & Regeneration gave a presentation to the Committee on the report issued by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) that had found fault with the way in which Miss X's homeless application was dealt with by LBTH when she had been threatened with homelessness in February, 2019 and homeless in March, 2019. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the LGO had found there was significant fault in the handling of Miss X's case causing her injustice.
- Was informed that homelessness is a significant topical issue, following a

change in the relevant law in April 2018 with the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA).

- Noted that LBTH agrees with the Ombudsman recommendations and has taken steps to remedy the injustice these faults can cause homeless people.
- Was informed that the LGO had identified that there had been poor record keeping by the Council.
- Noted that the Council had not (i) recorded any consideration of whether transferring hospitals for maternity care would be disruptive to Miss X; (ii) recorded any consideration of whether unfurnished accommodation, over an hour away from its area, was suitable for her. Given that Miss X had not lived alone before becoming homeless and would probably not have any furniture that she could bring to the accommodation.
- Was informed that LBTH had indicated to the LGO that it could not consider providing financial support for Miss X to obtain private rented accommodation until a decision had been made about whether Miss X was in priority need and owed the main housing duty. However, the LGO have expressed concern that LBTH had confused its duties. The relief duty applying to applicants whether they are in priority need, therefore Miss X's priority need was not relevant to the relief duty. LGO have now clarified this with LBTH.
- Noted that LBTH needed to be more creative in how it helps find accommodation to relieve homelessness.
- Noted that the Housing Options Service had undertaken preparations by way of training and IT system changes to manage the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018. Those preparations had involved training on the Act and a new IT module had been purchased to meet the requirements of the new data requirements, and undertook a review of processes to provide the relevant statutory notices that were required to apply new prevention and relief duty. Briefings and presentations had been provided to staff to raise awareness of the changes which had come into effect. However, inspite of this preparation the service fell short of the Act's expectation in relation to Ms X almost a year on since the Act had been enacted.
- Was pleased to note that (i) the Housing Options Service have now helped Miss X to secure temporary discretionary housing payment to obtain affordable accommodation in the private rented sector. This it was noted was in line with what the Act says LBTH can provide by way of relief and homelessness prevention; (ii) Letter of apology will be sent to Miss X; and (iii) £1,000 compensation will be remitted to Miss X's account.
- Noted that (i) the Housing Options Service are continually reviewing their ways of working and have taken steps to bring extra resources into the Service and have recruited a backlog team who are working through the outstanding cases. In addition, 4 officers have been recruited to assist in dealing with new clients as they present to the service to enable officers to work in line with the law; (ii) the Temporary Accommodation Bookings Team will ensure that all factors are taken into account when assessing suitability of accommodation and that these are recorded on the file for future reference; (iii) the Service will be increasing staffing levels funded

through the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) to enable some of the workload pressures to be addressed in the long-term. This will enable employees to manage their work more effectively and meet the requirements of the law, increase preventions, ensure accurate recording of data and more detailed recording keeping. Whilst the additional posts will ensure that a further backlog of cases does not occur once the current backlog has been cleared.

- Welcomed the IT improvements being made that will ensure systems are streamlined and reduce duplication of work and ensure efficiency in service delivery. Whilst the off-line forms it was noted are being devised to enable applicants to complete key forms to speed up the assessment process.
- Noted that apart from an improved IT infrastructure the Housing Options Service also requires offices that are fit for purpose to help people to have the right customer journey.
- Noted that LBTH has 3 months to submit an action plan to the LGO.
- Was informed that managers will be trained on Reflective Practice to enable them to hold sessions with their own teams. The plan is also to hold service wide sessions from February 2020 onwards which will allow staff to share their thoughts and ideas for service improvement; and
- Noted that valuable insight from the Employee Survey is being used to address the barriers that have been identified by staff to deliver a good service. Delivering the service through a ‘prevention and a customer journey’ lens that will form the basis of a service improvement plan; looking at, customer flows and pathways, channel shift, improved IT, collaborative working across teams with clarity of purpose/policies and procedures that support the work of the teams.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

1. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee consider the following (i) A review of the Council's implementation of the HRA legislation; (ii) An update in 3 months of the Housing Options Improvement Business Case; and (iii) An update on the backlog in regards to the Housing Options Service casework.

### 6.3 **Borough Commander Spotlight**

Detective Chief Superintendent Marcus Barnett, BCU Commander for Hackney and Tower Hamlets gave a presentation to the Committee on the challenges and key areas of work undertaken to tackle community safety. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted the BCU Commander must balance the available resources across LBTH and to those areas of greatest e.g. Night-time Economy and the linkages to criminality and public order.

- Noted that one of the issues raised by the Scrutiny Challenge Session (Resident Engagement with Safer Neighbourhood Panels) on the 23rd October 2019 was that residents expressed concern at the apparent lack of police officers on the Borough's Streets.
- Commented that there are concerns regarding 101 non-emergency number for contacting the police and wanted examples of so that they can be chased or evidence that the Police Service is working to increase capacity. In response it was noted that there was a new Head of Safeguarding in post who was looking at addressing residents' concerns e.g. detection rates and happy to come back to a future meeting to discuss this issue.
- Noted that residents want the Safer Neighbourhood Teams to have a higher profile for and to be kept informed of changes in staffing on the Ward Teams and to see improved interaction with Safer Neighbourhood Panels. In response the Committee noted that Inspector Chris Scammell was working to address this.
- Noted that the picture was currently unclear with regards to the drugs market in LBTH.
- Commented that it would like policies on resolution/detection rates on Domestic Violence.
- Commented that it wanted to see more transparency by the Police Service about what is happening to help build linkages with SNP and enable residents to effectively challenge their SNT.
- Indicated that on the Isle of Dogs residents felt that SNP had proven to be less effective than the Police Forum that had preceded it. Residents also wished to see an SNP that matches the Isle of Dogs boundaries, in response it was noted that (i) the BCU wanted strong functional SNP's in LBTH to work with SNT's and (ii) the BCU Commander indicated that he would be happy to meet on the Isle of Dogs Ward to discuss this issue.
- Noted that the BCU wanted a sharper focus on exploitation and slavery and multi-agency safeguarding hubs.
- Noted that the increasing numbers of officers will help to address short fall in neighbourhoods and provide greater stability and continuity; and
- Expressed concern regarding the levels of ASB and Criminality in Shoreditch and noted in response that the Police and LBTH officers have taken part in several operations funded by the Late-Night Levy to manage of late-night alcohol-related crime and disorder.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED** to:

- Ask the Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment to (i) escalate concerns regarding reporting; (ii) share the findings of the Scrutiny Challenge Session (Resident Engagement with Safer Neighbourhood Panels); and (iii) examine the balance of partnership resources within the BCU to see how better we can support Police activities and the development of the SNP's.

#### 6.4 Waste Mobilisation update

Councillor David Edgar (Cabinet Member for Environment); Dan Jones (Divisional Director, Public Realm); and Mark Griffin (Waste Mobilisation Advisor PR – Clean and Green) gave a presentation to the Committee regarding the creation of an in-house service for the integrated delivery of waste, recycling and cleansing functions for the 29th March 2020. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that good progress is being made on procurement activities across fleet and contingency arrangements have been established with Veolia. With leasing and spot hire procurement a priority to enable a smooth transition from Veolia's fleet to a new Council fleet.
- Noted that steps have been taken steps to replace the Council's older more polluting vehicles with ones that met the requirements of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) and to put in place an electric charging infrastructure. Smaller vehicles on the fleet will be leased for up to 3 years and during that time that will allow LBTH to look at replacing those vehicles with other electric or other clean technology vehicles.
- Noted that there are issues with Euro 6 vehicles blowing filters but this can be addressed by effective maintenance and specific details can provide to the Committee.
- Noted that (i) consultation with Veolia staff and trade union representatives is well advanced and has been positive; and (ii) practical arrangements for staff checks, inductions; training and employees' terms and conditions with the creation of the in-house service are being finalized.
- Was supportive of this project and encouraged to see work being done to keep Veolia to the contract.
- Asked how (a) LBTH will ensure that performance improves and (b) will scrutiny be kept updated on progress. In response it was noted that the performance management information using (i) visual inspections; (ii) residents reports; (iii) staff targets (iv) staff feedback; (v) more resources for Street Cleansing; and (vi) a new IT systems will all provide better information to enable a thorough analysis of performance.
- Wanted more information on the environment impact of the new vehicle fleet.
- Noted that there would be a review of the service 6 months after the establishment of the in-house service.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED** to:

1. Request more information on the environment impact of the new vehicle fleet.
2. Undertake a scrutiny review of the service 6 months after the establishment of the in-house service; and
3. Receive an update after 6 months on the employees' terms and conditions following the formation of the in-house service.

**7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

Scrutiny Leads were requested to provide written updates prior to the next meeting.

**8. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**

As per attached appendices

**9. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR  
CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**

The Committee noted that:

1. The Scrutiny Report on the Budget had been circulated for comment.
2. There was to be an additional recommendation regarding the MTFS proposals.
3. At the February meeting there would be an item on Changes to Customer Service.

**10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

As the agenda circulated contained no exempt/confidential business and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

**11. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

Nil items

**12. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items

**13. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET  
PAPERS**

Nil items

**14. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR  
CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil items

**Chair, Councillor James King  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

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