

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 27 JULY 2020**

**ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)**

**Members Present:**

Councillor James King (Chair)	
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	– (Scrutiny Lead for Health & Adults)
Councillor Dipa Das	– (Scrutiny Lead for Housing & Regeneration)
Councillor Tarik Khan	– (Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance)
Councillor Bex White	– (Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment)
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	

**Co-opted Members Present:**

Halima Islam	– (Co-Optee)
James Wilson	– (Co-Optee)

**Apologies:**

Councillor Andrew Wood

**Others Present:**

Mayor John Biggs  
Councillor Rachel Blake  
(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing),  
Councillor Candida Ronald  
(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector)  
Councillor Dan Tomlinson  
(Cabinet Member, Environment and Public Realm)

**Officers Present:**

Adam Boey	– (Senior Strategy & Policy Manager - Corporate)
Afazul Hoque	– (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Dan Jones	– (Divisional Director, Public Realm)
Neville Murton	– (Corporate Director, Resources)
Joanne Starkie	– (Head of Strategy and Policy - Health Adults and Communities)
Denise Radley	– (Corporate Director, Health, Adults & Community)
Zoe Folley	– (Committee Officer, Governance)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillor Andrew Wood

**2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS**

Councillor Kahar Chowdhury declared a Non-DPI interest in any budget items relating to the care sector due to his wife's employment in that sector.

**3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

**RESOLVED**

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 June 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

In respect of item 7, Verbal updates from scrutiny leads, it was agreed that the Scrutiny Lead's written updates would be attached to the minutes. (Attached)

Regarding the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 February 2020, item 8.3, One O' clock club, it was confirmed that the resolution should be amended to read:

**RESOLVED** that on the basis of the information and advice received that the decision to close this service did not meet the threshold of a key decision.

The committee further discussed how it might be advisable for the council to conduct some of the exercises a key decision warrants, like public consultation or sign off by an appropriate Executive member when service

proposed for closure are long standing, public facing or likely to produce a strong public reaction

In response to a request by Councillor Marc Francis, it was reported that unfortunately, recordings would not routinely be made of exempt/restricted parts of meetings and one was not available in this case. Democratic Services agreed respond to this point in writing.

#### **4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS**

None

#### **5. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

Noted

#### **6. BUDGET MONITORING**

The Committee received a report from Mayor John Biggs, Councillor Candida Ronald and Neville Murton. This provided an overview of the quarter 3 monitoring position against the approved budget, 2019-20.

The following points were discussed.

- That the Cabinet agenda for 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 comprised a number of reports relating to the budget and the impact of COVID-19.
- Details of the budget outturn position in relation to the General Fund, Dedicated Schools Budget, Housing Revenue Account and earmarked reserves for 2020-21.
- The natures of the challenges due in the main to COVID-19, particularly in relation to the demand for services, income from business rates, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and similar to other Councils, an overspend on the Children's Social Care budget
- Level of additional government funding received.
- That to help address this, the Council should continue to work with other Councils to lobby the Government to provide assistance.

In response to the presentation, the Committee discussed the following:

- Members sought further details on the nature of the overspend and the likelihood of further slippages.
- It was confirmed that, unless the Government provided further assistance, the Council will need to identify additional saving. In addition, it was possible that the savings target may no longer be achievable, due to such factors as unavoidable delays in consultation exercises because of COVID-19. The Council needed to carry out further work to fully identify the implications of this.

- The Committee also discussed the provision of Government assistance, providing the Council with additional funding and concessions. Neville Murton noted that this amounted to \$19.4M.
- The new measures enabled the Council to spread the deficit over three years and provided relief in relation to a number of areas. It was noted that this funding should reduce the budget deficit. Further support may be provided.
- Committee were also advised of governance guidance regarding operating with a deficit and loss of income.
- The Committee asked questions about the level of overspend due to COVID-19.
- It was noted that the Capital Outturn report sets out the figures. The report indicated that, even with the mitigation, funding would need to be drawn down from reserves. Details of which were noted.
- A further report should be available in Autumn 2020.
- The Committee also sought further information on the Children's Service Budget, given the previous overspend on the budget relating to the Children's Improvement Plan. Some concern was expressed about the misjudgement over the level of funding and the impacts such issues have on budget planning.
- In response, Members were advised of the reasons for this and the need for the additional resources at that time to support the plan. However, it was noted that the overspend for this year is less than that for other services. Many other Councils have experienced the same issues. The Council had also put in place a number of measures to reduce the overspend by for example reducing the number of agency social workers.
- Members sought assurances on the controls to ensure that spending remained within budget, and budget holders were held to account for spending. It was felt that tracking savings should be a priority.
- It was noted that Budgets were managed in line with the Council's constitution including the finance and procurement regulations.
- Officers had introduced additional controls, and intended to put in place further controls to ensure this, including applying restrictions over recruitment and strengthening the internal mechanisms in holding budget holders to account.
- The Committee Chair suggested that the budget process for next year should start now, including much earlier consultation – given the importance of upcoming decisions.
- The Committee also discussed the consequences of a reduction of reserves and unmade savings.
- The Committee also noted the advantages and disadvantages of a three year rolling budget. A Member suggested that consideration should be looking at this year in isolation under the circumstances and this issue should be looked at further.

Mayor John Biggs and Councillor Candida Ronald were thanked for their presentation.

## 7. LIVEABLE STREETS

The Committee received an update from Councillor Dan Tomlinson (Cabinet Member, Environment and the Public Realm) and Dan Jones, (Divisional Director, Public Realm) on the Liveable Streets programme.

Councillor Tomlinson advised of the key objective of the scheme, which can be summarised as follows:

- to improve the look and feel of public spaces.
- to improve the environment to encourage more walking and cycling.
- to significantly reduce cut through traffic on local residential streets, through for example, identifying and consulting on the use of more suitable routes for such traffic.

He also gave an overview of the following issues:

- The progress in meeting the timetable, highlighting the delays in carrying out the work for certain areas due in main to COVID-19. A number of projects remained broadly on schedule. It was anticipated that, due to the work to catch up, projects should still be completed on time. However, extensions to timeframes have been agreed where necessary.
- The TfL decision regarding the funding of the scheme. There would be a report to the Cabinet in September 2020 on the funding for the project.
- The consultation exercise.

The full presentation was available on the Council's website.

In response to the presentation, the following points were discussed:

- In relation to the consultation, the Committee noted the checks carried out on responses to identify the number of local responses.
- Further details of the responses received can be provided to the Committee Members.
- The importance of the Council taking a proactive approach to its communications for the scheme.
- It was noted that the Council sought to reach out to the community in a number of ways. In relation to this, Councillor Tomlinson highlighted the work of Councillors in engaging with the local community on the scheme. Other activities included: posting out hard copies of leaflets on the proposals to households, holding workshops and engaging with key stakeholders and groups that would be most affected by any changes. In line with other schemes, Community language leaflets could be provided if there was demand for these.
- The implications of the TfL decision on the budget. As a result of this, it was noted that it may be necessary to review the programme in light of this. The Council was still in the process of reviewing the funding for the scheme. A report on the Liveable Streets programme and the funding for it was due to be considered by the Cabinet in September

2020. The Committee noted that they should look out for the capital programme report to identify how the Liveable Streets programme is included.

- The impact of the traffic diversions on low income families and social housing. Members were keen to ensure that it did not adversely affect particular groups.
- In response Councillor Tomlinson stated that he was mindful of the need to take into account the different needs of residents, and to seek a balance between this and meeting the aims of the scheme. He underlined his commitment to carefully consider the consultation responses before taking any decision. The impact from for example road closures were constantly reviewed.
- That the Council's engaged with Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords to coordinate work, and more details can be provided on this.
- That need for risk assessments for emergency access routes. The Council always worked to ensure that the Emergency Services were consulted and had no objections to proposals.
- The decision to focus on the roads most in need in improvement. The Council could still make improvements to roads not in this scheme.
- The measures to provide CCTV and control speeding cars.
- It was confirmed that the focus of the scheme mainly concerned improving local streets. However, the enhancements should also help address ASB, for example the Barkentine proposals sought to provide CCTV. Further consideration can also be given to ways the plans may help prevent ASB.
- The e-petition published on the Council's website on road closures.
- It was felt that it would be helpful if the Council could consider this Petition before the Cabinet meeting where the decision on the scheme was taken scheduled for September 2020.
- The scheme would be regularly monitored and reviewed.
- Councillor Dan Tomlinson reported that he was happy to provide an update on the programme at future meeting.

The Committee thanked Councillor Dan Tomlinson for his presentation.

## **8. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LBTH**

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor Rachel Blake, (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing), Denise Radley, (Corporate Director for Adults Health and Wellbeing) and Joanne Starkie(Head of Strategy and Policy – Health, Adults and Communities). The presentation provided an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on the borough – a more comprehensive set of detailed slides was made available. The full presentation was available on the Council's website.

The discussions on this presentation are summarised as follows:

- The report and appendices described the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tower Hamlets.
- The presentation covered 15 topics, and the first seven of which had been identified as the most significant.
- The Committee noted details of each of these topics in turn, particularly the issues around: mortality and physical health, mental health, social care, deprivation and employment, business, community and voluntary sector, homelessness and rough sleeping, safeguarding adults and children, domestic abuse, crime and ASB, education and learning, transport and air quality, community cohesion and the LBTH workforce.
- The presentation also focused on the national impact to date, the local impact, and any groups particularly effected.
- The presentation then looked at predicted future opportunities and challenges.

In response to the presentation, a Member stressed the need to look at the use of Equalities Grids at other Council's such as at Hackney and Newham. Councillor Blake undertook to look at this. She also advised that she was mindful of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the BME community both in terms of the health impacts and economic issues. In view of this, the Administration had launched a new Race Inequality Enquiry to ensure this was at the centre of work. The Council had also made recommendations to the Government Review.

A Member also asked about the work to identify best practice elsewhere. In response, it was noted that the Council worked closely with other Council and external bodies through for example participating in

- a north east London Track and Trace group with the NHS
- the Directors of Public Health Networks
- Safeguarding Adults Boards
- Working with other Local Authorities to gather information and coordinate a response.

The Committee thanked Councillor Rachel Blake, Denise Radley, and Joanne Starkie for attending the Committee to provide the presentation and respond to questions.

## **9. COVID-19 SCRUTINY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION**

The Chair invited the Committee comments on the Committee's draft report on the above following their review. He invited the Chairs of the Scrutiny Sub – Committees to report back on the findings of their recent meetings regarding the impact on COVID-19 and also the Scrutiny Leads to report.

In response the following issues were noted:

Councillor Kahar Chowdhury (Chair of the Health & Adults Scrutiny Sub Committee) made suggestions in respect of the following areas/recommendations in the draft report:

- Communication with the community – particularly the need to reach out to hard to reach groups and the need to carry out outreach work.
- Uptake of testing – the need to target at risk groups, working with relevant groups, and to gain a better understanding of their circumstances, and to monitor testing.
- Shielding – provision of help and support to those who needed to shield including pathways. In relation to this point it was noted that the Government's shielding programme had come to an end this week. The Council had agreed a follow up programme with Primary Care and was considering how we take this forward

Comments were also made regarding:

- Care homes and the need to put in place recommendations to improve the situation in such settings. In response, the Corporate Director drew attention to the Care Homes Support Plan. This report sets out a summary of work the council has undertaken with partners (through the Integrated Care Partnership Tower Hamlets) to support local care homes during the coronavirus pandemic. This is available on Council's website. The Corporate Director had also prepared a learning review of the impact. This should be ready soon and she was happy to circulate this to the Committee.
- The need to support test and contract trace. The report should look at how this can be supported.
- The need to look at the suitability of homeliness and housing placements in a pandemic. The Council should apply for additional funding from the everyone is in funding.

Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan (Chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee) reported that whilst her Sub – Committee had yet to meet, she considered it important to support schools and young people in respect of the following areas:

- Responding to the budget contains.
- The delivery of the recovery programme
- Access to education and the re - opening up of schools.
- Provision of free school meals and reviewing impacts of the changes on this.

Councillor Tarik Khan (Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance) also commented on the report. He stressed the need to:

- make savings by looking at selling assets to ease the burden
- to support local economy and use of local providers.

Councillor Bex White (Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment) addressed the Committee. She spoke about the quickness of the Council's response to providing social distancing measures in comparisons to other Council's and the need for this to be reviewed in case there is a second wave.

The Committee also discussed a proposal to increase the grant support to market traders provided by the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Scheme if there was an underspend on this budget. It was noted that the Government had announced that assistance will come to an end and that any underspend should be returned to the Government.

**10. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil Items

**11. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

Reported under item 9.

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

As per attached appendices.

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

Nil Items

**14. 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.

**15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

Nil Items

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

Nil Items

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

Nil Items

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

Nil Items

The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.

Chair, Councillor James King  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee