

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council
May 2011**



TOWER HAMLETS

Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

Overview and Scrutiny
Cllr Ann Jackson, Chair

Excellent Public Services
Cllr Rajib Ahmed

Prosperous Community
Cllr Rachael Saunders (November 2010 – May 2011), Cllr Rabina Khan (May 2010
– October 2010)

Great Place to Live
Cllr Zenith Rahman

Safe and Supportive
Cllr Lesley Pavitt

One Tower Hamlets
Cllr Ahmed Omer, Vice Chair

Health Scrutiny Panel
Cllr Tim Archer

Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

Overview and Scrutiny looks at how the Council and its partners deliver services so that they meet local needs and contribute to the overall vision in the borough's Community Plan. It also monitors and evaluates the decisions made by the Council's Mayor and his Cabinet to make sure that they are robust and provide good value for money.

Overview and Scrutiny has statutory powers to review and scrutinise local health services and make recommendations to NHS bodies. It also considers other issues of concern to local people, including services provided by other organisations, and advises the Mayor and Cabinet, Council and other partners, on how those policies and services can be improved.

In Tower Hamlets, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee coordinates all scrutiny work. It appoints the vice chair and six scrutiny leads. The scrutiny leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders. They also pick up any relevant issues on behalf of the Committee as a whole and lead the working groups within their theme.

Membership

Reflecting the overall political balance of the Council during 2010/11 the Committee's membership comprised six Labour councillors and one councillor from the Conservative, Respect and Liberal Democrat Parties.

As well as the councillors, there are six education co-optee positions on the Committee, including three positions for parent governors. The other representatives were from the Church of England Diocese, the Roman Catholic Diocese and the Muslim Community. In 2010/11, all positions, except a representative from Roman Catholic Diocese, were filled. Each of these representatives could contribute to any matters discussed by the Committee, but they could only vote on education issues. The representative of the Muslim community was made available locally, in recognition of the large Muslim community in the borough.

Scrutiny Chair and Leads

In 2010/11, the Chair of the Committee was Councillor Ann Jackson. The Chair oversaw the work programme of the committee as well as taking lead on monitoring the Council's budget.

Apart from Excellent Public Services, the other five themes which each Scrutiny Lead is responsible for are pillars of the borough's Community Plan. The Scrutiny Leads were:

- Cllr Rajib Ahmed (Labour) for "Excellent Public Services-" focusing on improving public services to make sure they represent good value for money and meet local needs.
- Cllr Rachael Saunders (Labour)¹ for "Prosperous Community-" focusing on raising educational aspirations, expectations and achievement, and bringing investment into the borough and ensuring residents and businesses benefit from growing economic prosperity.
- Cllr Zenith Rahman (Labour) for "Great Place to Live-" focusing on improving housing and the environment and providing a wide range of arts and leisure services.
- Cllr Lesley Pavitt (Labour) for "Safe and Supportive-" focusing on reducing crime, making people feel safer and providing excellent services to the borough's most vulnerable communities.

¹ Cllr Saunders succeeded Cllr Rabina Khan as the Scrutiny Lead in November 2010.
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- Cllr Ahmed Omer (Labour) for “One Tower Hamlets-” focusing on reducing inequalities and improving community cohesion through community leadership. He was also the vice chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Cllr Tim Archer (Conservative) for “Healthy Community-” through the Health Scrutiny Panel, focusing on improving local health services and the co-ordination of different health service providers within the borough.

Scrutiny Leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders by conducting in-depth ‘Scrutiny Reviews’, which usually involve several meetings and visits to gather evidence on particular services or issues which impact on the local community. ‘Scrutiny Challenge Sessions’ are also undertaken by some Scrutiny Leads. This is one-off meeting looking at a specific area of concern within the community. They are designed as a quick way for Councillors to get a grip on key policy issues and to make recommendations for further development of the policy.

In 2010/11, there were two other non-executive Members who served on the Committee:

Cllr Stephanie Eaton

Cllr Harun Miah - May 2010 – October 2010

Cllr Fozol Miah – March 2011 – May 2011

They have contributed to the work of the Committee. In particular, their contribution in the areas of budget scrutiny, call-ins, scrutiny spotlights and performance monitoring was very useful in holding the Executive to account and ensuring that our services meet our residents’ needs.

What does Overview and Scrutiny do?

The Committee:

- Looks at how the Council is performing by monitoring key strategies and plans
- Looks at the Council’s budget and how it uses its resources
- Sets up time-limited working groups to look at issues in depth and make proposals for change. Suggestions for topics may come from elected Members, full Council, the Cabinet or from local organisations and residents
- Considers decisions made by the Cabinet that are ‘called in.’ This happens if there is concern about the decision or what information was considered
- Reviews briefly the reports that are going to Cabinet for decision and raises any concerns.

As the Committee has such a broad responsibility, it focuses on a number of key priorities each year. These make up an annual work programme for each of the Scrutiny Leads. For each area there is usually one in-depth review, as well as other shorter pieces of work.

Health Scrutiny

The Health Scrutiny Panel undertakes the Council’s functions under the Health and Social Care Act, 2001. This gives local councils the power to scrutinise health services. The Scrutiny Panel was set up to undertake this role, scrutinising health service matters in Tower Hamlets due to the high health inequalities that exist locally. This can include the provision of hospital and GP services and health promotion and prevention work. It can scrutinise how services are planned and provided and how the views of local people are built into the provision.

Health is currently going through a rapid pace of change, not only has the health budget been subject to financial tightening, there are proposals in place for radical change which places local control at the heart of the new approach. Health Scrutiny should continue to have a

stronger role in holding decision makers to account and will continue to ensure the needs and views of local people are considered.

Annual Report

This report provides a brief summary of the work of Overview and Scrutiny in 2010/11. Below, each member of the Committee outlines the work that they have led.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillor Ann Jackson, Chair

The Overview and Scrutiny arrangements in Tower Hamlets include:

- A single co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Five Scrutiny Leads scrutinising the Community Plan themes and one for Excellent Public Services
- Pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports
- Performance monitoring by considering the Quarterly Strategic Plan & Budget Monitoring report, the Diversity and Equality Action Plan, Corporate Complaints and Members' Enquiries
- A robust call-in procedure
- Holding the Executive to account through Scrutiny Spotlight for Cabinet Members
- A Health Scrutiny Panel to respond to consultation from NHS Trusts

In order to develop a comprehensive work programme for the year we held an Away Day in June 2010 which enabled us to prioritise our work for the year. We agreed a challenging and extensive work programme in July 2010 and I believe we have delivered on the majority of it. Over the year, we regularly monitored our progress to make sure we remained on track to complete our work.

This year, we have improved significantly the engagement with Lead Members at Committee. They have presented the majority of reports within their portfolio that the Committee considered, as well as responding to call-ins. This is really important in making sure we hold the Executive directly to account and encouraging more discussion and debate amongst councillors.

There has also been a good level of engagement with the public. Firstly, the majority of our reviews sought the views and experiences of local people through visits and focus groups. And secondly, a number of deputations were made by members of the public at Committee, usually related to a call-in that was being considered.

Performance Monitoring

We monitor the Strategic Plan and Corporate Revenue Monitoring report every quarter and twice a year we monitor the Single Equality Framework. We are the only formal councillor forum that does this and it's important in making sure that our services are performing well. I believe this worked effectively and helped Overview and Scrutiny understand and comment on the wider performance of services - a key part of improving the quality of life of local people.

We also had monthly Scrutiny Spotlights at our Committee meetings for the Cabinet Members including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. At all the sessions Cabinet Members discussed the performance and challenges facing services in their area of responsibility. This was particularly useful for us to discuss issues of concern and suggest ways performance could be improved. It also helped involve Cabinet Members more in the scrutiny process and several of them commented how useful they found the opportunity to discuss policy and performance issues with non-executive councillors at Committee. We also held our first Scrutiny Spotlight with the Chief Executive and this was a great opportunity to raise a number of issues with him.

The Committee consistently challenged Cabinet Members on areas of underperformance, including anti-social behaviour, provisions for young people and perhaps most importantly on employment. This last area has been subject to a number of full-scale scrutiny reviews the past few years as well as consideration at an early stage of the Draft Employment Strategy

where the Committee made a number of recommendations for improvements. The committee was determined that the Council continues to explore opportunities to support our residents into employment in the current economic climate.

We also considered the Council's annual Corporate and Social Care Complaints report. All councillors were pleased to see the improved performance in responding to complaints. Councillors take up many complaints each year, and getting a quick and full response is an essential part of that work. We welcomed the on-going work the Council was doing with local Registered Social Landlords and other partners to improve their performance and quality of response.

Policy Framework

Within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework there are a number of key policy documents that set out how the Council will act. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider these before Council agrees them and this year we discussed the following:

- **Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy**

The committee welcomed the strategy and raised a number of issues for Cabinet to consider including the development of the borough fringe areas, particularly the Bethnal Green/Hackney border needed more attention to improve quality of the environment and also encourage businesses to this area. There was a need to identify a waste site for the borough and further develop our saturation policy of fast food outlets particularly near schools and consideration of our recommendations from last year's review on childhood obesity. Finally, the Committee recommended that the Cabinet consider how the subsequent developments plan arising from the Core Strategy should engage local residents at a level they can easily understand.

- **Local Implementation Plan 2**

The Committee considered the Local Implementation Plan and offered a number of comments for Cabinet's consideration. The Mayor of Tower Hamlets was requested to lobby Transport for London and the Mayor of London to bring forward the upgrade of Whitechapel Underground Station to coincide with the opening of the new Royal London Hospital and also against proposals to reduce the operating hours of the Thames Clipper to 8pm daily. The Committee also suggested measures that could be taken to improve the reliability of the bus service and the promotion of pedestrian walkway routes through the borough. We also expressed concerns about the proposed reductions in grants and budgets and the possible impact on St Paul's Way Transformation Scheme and Shoreditch Station works at Braithwaite Street.

Other Policy Work

The committee also considered a number of other policy area as part of its work and offered comments and recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

- **Car Free Development**

In the last municipal year the Committee considered local concerns around car free development and the availability of street parking permits. Following that discussion the Cabinet Member agreed to provide an update to the Committee which was considered at the November meeting. We noted the detailed work on the creation of an improved and more robust administration system for car free homes through the planning application determination process. A Car Free Review Group has also been established to resolve the issues identified. In addition, work was underway with car club providers and the Tower Hamlets cycle scheme to develop other options. However, the Committee raised a number of questions on related issues including:

- Identifying the definitive number of instances of similar errors and the properties/individuals affected
- The consistency of approach to resolving such errors
- Clarification of the term “car free” development
- Notification to prospective tenants/buyers of any restrictions on parking permits.

The Committee agreed that this may be an issue for future scrutiny review if the problem persists.

- **Draft Employment Strategy**

The Committee welcomed the opportunity to comment on the draft Employment Strategy during the consultation period. It was noted that Strategy provided a sophisticated analysis of unemployment in the borough including how it was impacting our diverse communities. The Committee raised a number of points with the Cabinet Member and Officer around shaping the future job market, the importance of raising aspirations and linking up with local schools, colleges and universities, continuing developing our understanding of the barriers to employment for hard to reach communities and different equalities group and how geographical boundaries can be broken down to support residents access jobs across London. We hope that our comments recommendations are incorporated by the Mayor in the final Strategy.

- **Strategic Plan – Year 1 Action Plan 2011/12**

The Committee considered the Outline Plan and Action Plan of next year’s Strategic Plan which outlined the key activities and milestones that had been created in line with the Mayor’s priorities and following consultation with residents, third sector organisations and partner agencies. We highlighted the importance of building higher aspirations and excellence on our education targets and also encouraging entrepreneurship and apprenticeships which a number of young people wanted to pursue. We also recommended that engagement with residents was crucial in delivering our transformation programme and this should take an approach that is easily understood by local residents.

- **Childhood Obesity Scrutiny Review**

The Action Plan arising from last year’s Scrutiny Review on reducing Childhood Obesity included two recommendations to report back to the Committee on the evaluation of the Healthy Borough Programme and the programme of work being undertaken by the Building Schools for Future (BSF) Programme to create more sports spaces and better dining facilities. The Committee noted that the Public Health White Paper provided an opportunity to continue with some of the work undertaken by the Healthy Borough Programme and once all the evaluation work had been completed the intention was to produce a comprehensive report pulling together all the highlights and evidence of learning with a set of recommendations to influence future strategic direction. As the BSF Programme was in its infancy it was too early to fully realise the benefits as many projects had only recently been completed but the aspirations set in the design and delivery will certainly help encourage a healthier lifestyle approach within the school environment.

Scrutiny of the Budget

The scrutiny of the budget proposals this year became crucial with the public sector facing the most severe and probably the most prolonged period of real term reductions for public spending for many decades. We considered the budget at three of our meetings and also held a specific budget scrutiny session with the Cabinet Member for Resources, the Corporate Director for Resources and a number of other Corporate Directors.

Following our discussions we made a number of recommendations to the Mayor and his Cabinet for their consideration. We highlighted the importance of informing and engaging residents about the budget proposals to ensure they better understood our decisions and have also had an opportunity to contribute to it. It was also suggested that the Mayor review the Council's accommodation strategy to enable us to achieve value for money from our existing facilities and develop a strategy which reflects the current and future challenges facing the Council. We held detailed discussion about the impact on local residents from the budget reductions and have recommended that the Mayor work with the Committee next year to start developing a more sophisticated understating of this. We were particularly concerned about the impact of stopping some services such as Housing Link and the transfer of other services to third sector or private providers. The Committee welcomed the work undertaken by the Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Resources to find transition support for these services catering for our most vulnerable residents. Finally, the Committee agreed that a Budget Scrutiny Working Group be set up next year which looks at the impact of the budget and future budget proposals.

The Committee's work on the budget this year has had a significant impact on the final budget agreed by Full Council. This has been based on a constructive working relationship with the Cabinet and Officers. This relationship and work will need to continue next year to ensure the budget is put through a robust scrutiny process before the Cabinet consider their final budget.

Pre-decision scrutiny

The Committee can submit questions about Cabinet reports before a decision is taken. I feel we have strengthened this over the year and commented on 37 Cabinet reports (compared to 23 last year). Among these were:

- Lettings Policy & Plan
- Council Housing Finance Reforms – Implications for Tower Hamlets
- LBTH Housing Strategy
- Poplar Bath Procurement Route
- Conservation Strategy
- Neighbourhood Shops Policy
- Determination of School Admission Arrangements
- Local Development Framework
- Local Implementation Plan 2
- Borough Wide Drinking Control Zones
- Supporting People Strategy

Our questions and concerns provided further information at Cabinet and clarified some uncertainties thus improving the decision-making process. The responses also inform councillors' decisions over call-ins.

Call-ins

The Committee has considered five call-ins this year. This was consistent to the last two years and is a significant decrease from previous years.

Report Called-in	O&S Decision
Idea Store Strategy Action Plan Update - Idea Store Watney Market and One Stop Shop	Referred back to Cabinet
Enforcement Policy & RIPA	Confirmed

Children, Schools & Families - Contract Awards	Confirmed
Leasehold Policy Review	Referred back to Cabinet
Commercial Activities in Victoria Park	Referred back to Cabinet

Debate of the call-ins was robust and rigorous and on a number of these the Lead Members gave assurances that they would take some of the concerns raised on board. For example, on the Commercial Activities in Victoria Park, Cabinet agreed to sustainably change their original decision including looking to further limit the number of commercial and non-commercial event days in Victoria Park, further reduce closing time, replace a dance event with a more family orientated event and officers to continue monitoring levels of disturbance to local residents. This change in decision will significantly reduce the impact on local residents and address some of their concerns.

It is also worth highlighting that because of the items called in, attendance by local people and other councillors has increased substantially at the Committee meetings. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny and highlight the important role it has within the borough.

Co-opted and Appointed Representatives

For the first time nearly all the statutory co-opted members have been appointed to the Committee. They received an Induction Session which also included presentation from our Children, Schools and Families Directorate and we have supported them throughout the year to develop their role and help them be more effective. The Parent Governors also have a slot at the quarterly Director of Children, Schools & Families briefing for all school governors to brief them on the work of the Committee and also to bring back issues for the Committee to consider. We also welcomed a number of local residents (Local Area Partnership Steering Group Members) onto many of the Scrutiny Working Groups. This has been particularly useful in bringing local residents views into our scrutiny reviews and also the development of a number of recommendations of the Working Groups.

We intend to build on this further next year to enable co-opted Members to help us further engage more local residents in the scrutiny process and ensure that more of their concerns come to the Committee's attention.

Checking our own progress

Twice a year we monitor the recommendations we have made, not just those at committee but also those from our reviews and other investigations. Services are asked to provide an update so we can see whether progress is being made. The latest monitoring indicates that nearly all of our recommendations since July 2007 are being acted on or achieved.

In developing the first monitoring report all the Scrutiny Lead Members revisited a review within their portfolio area. This was undertaken through 1-2-1 meetings with Lead Officers from the service area of the review. This provided Members a useful way of monitoring the implementation of recommendations, identify key outcomes as a result of the review and also consider any difficulties around implementing the recommendations. The reviews that were revisited are:

- Interpreting and Translation Services – Cllr Ahmed Omer
- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour – Cllr Lesley Pavitt
- Choice Based Lettings Scheme - Cllr Zenith Rahman
- Young Peoples Participation in Olympics leading up to Olympics – Cllr Tim Archer
- Evaluation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund – Cllr Rabina Khan

- Use of Consultants – Cllr Rajib Ahmed

Raising the Profile

We continue to improve how and when we communicate with Members, Officers and the public. We used the weekly Members' Bulletin regularly. The Manager's Briefing and the staff newsletter, Tower Hamlets Now, were also used to promote scrutiny work, so that council officers are well informed about the scrutiny work programme, upcoming reviews, review findings, and how they can be involved.

East End Life and our Scrutiny web pages are also vehicles to keep residents informed about the work scrutiny was undertaking. A number of the reviews attracted significant interest from local people; particularly the Public Perception of Parking and Supporting New Communities. More detail of these is included in the reports by the Scrutiny Leads.

The Role of Scrutiny under an Executive Mayor – Scrutiny Review

In addition to the scrutiny reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Leads this year, I also led one on the role of scrutiny under an Executive Mayor. The election of the borough's first directly elected Mayor provided an opportune time to consider the role of scrutiny in strengthening accountability and the community leadership role of non-executive councillors.

The Working Group held sessions with officers from the Council, local residents, former councillors (Chairs of their Overview and Scrutiny Committee) from Newham and Lewisham, Officers from Hackney and Greater London Assembly. We also considered evidence – best practice, case studies from other Mayoral authorities across the country in order to come to our conclusions and recommendations.

A number of issues have emerged from our discussion with one over-arching message around 'developing a borough with a strong culture of accountability. The evidence we heard outlined that under an Executive Mayor effective and robust accountability is crucial. In addition, with change in national performance management framework and the demise of Comprehensive Area Assessment, strengthens the need for a robust local form of accountability. This is more than systems, structures and legislation rather focused around the culture of accountability that exists within public sector organisations. We have identified three key themes that influence this culture of accountability. Firstly in regards to Members we have made recommendations around developing Members as champions for challenging the Mayor, developing their community leadership and increasing their participation in the scrutiny process. In regards to public sector organisations we have focused on developing the role of scrutiny in the borough, ensuring there is a greater balance between reviews and challenging key decisions by bringing an alternative course of action and increasing the profile of scrutiny. Finally, we proposed a number of recommendations on enabling local residents to hold the Mayor to account and influence key decisions and policies.

I see this review as the beginning of our work on local governance and strengthening scrutiny in an era of significant national policy change and reduction in resources. I have held discussion with the Mayor about the draft recommendations and the scrutiny team have also been exploring these issues with a variety of officers across the Council. A number of 1-2-1 interviews have been held with Members from the different parties and all of this information will be used to supplement the report. We are also in discussion with the Centre for Public Scrutiny about becoming a pilot for their 'Accountability Works For You Model'. The final report along with these pieces of work will be reported to the new Committee in the municipal year.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has made considerable progress this year. In particular, having Lead Members attend the Committee to present reports and outline the reasons for decisions has significantly enhanced the role and value of scrutiny. We are holding the Executive to account - particularly around performance monitoring and through considering call-ins – and influencing Cabinet decisions. The reviews have also made an important contribution to addressing local people’s concerns – for example, around safeguarding adults at risks, parking, housing repairs and health issues. This is an exciting time to be part of scrutiny with the emphasis the government has placed on strengthening local community leadership, increasing the involvement of local residents in the decision making process and the whole transparency agenda. I believe our work this year has equipped us to strengthen the impact of the committee in the future.

Excellent Public Services

Cllr Rajib Ahmed

As the Scrutiny Lead for the Excellent Public Services, I examined two topics on how the Council communicates, engages and provides services to our residents. Residents responded well to the opportunities to share their views alongside the Councillors, and actively participated in discussions at meetings. I believe that these scrutiny reviews will make a difference to the Council's policies.

Citizen Engagement Strategy

This review aimed to examine the development of the Citizen Engagement Strategy and to help ensure that the strategy became a robust tool for engaging local residents in our and the partnership's work. The aim of the strategy is to set out how the partnership can create a more 'powerful public' and how citizens can participate and engage with the decision-making process that impact on their lives and local communities and take greater control over the issues. Citizen engagement in this strategy means not only the sharing power, information and mutual respect between the government and residents, but also letting residents take the initiative in public service delivery by redistributing power to them.

The review involved presentations on the Big Society, a visit to the community champions workshop and a challenge session. Twenty-two stakeholders, including Third Sector organisations and residents and Councillors, attended the challenge session. The discussion in the challenge session can be categorised into: 1) issues that the Citizen Engagement Strategy needs to cover and; 2) the 'goal' of the strategy – what would a 'powerful public' look like.

The working group made seven recommendations, including clearly outlining the purpose, vision of a powerful public, scope, pathways to the goal of the strategy, involving all residents including communities of interest and 'hard to reach' communities in the strategy, identifying key stakeholders and their roles in the strategy, and clearly outlining the role of elected members as local community leaders.

Developing efficient customer services

A challenge session was arranged to consider efficient and effective access to customer services for all our residents. The session was attended by 12 stakeholders, including residents and Councillors.

Keeping customer access channels including telephone, online and in person available and easy to access is important for customer satisfaction with Council services. The challenge we face is to continue delivering effective customer services in light of the need to make significant efficiency savings. The session explored ways to reduce the cost of access and yet maintain customer satisfaction.

The recommendations included offering more online services, encouraging customers to use efficient means of accessing services, continuing to find solutions to customers' problems and publicising the Council's role to manage customer expectations.

Conclusion

The recommendations from these reviews will improve dialogue between the Council (and partners) and residents/customers. This will enhance understanding of their needs and the Council and partners' service delivery. I would also like to thank all those who participated in the sessions and shared their invaluable views and experiences.

I was appointed to the position of the Scrutiny Lead for Prosperous Community in November 2010. My portfolio covers a range of issues including education, employment and skills, economic development and reducing poverty in the borough. I led a scrutiny review on empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), considering the sector's important contribution to the borough's economy. My predecessor, Cllr Rabina Khan, conducted a scrutiny challenge session on raising participation in post 16 learning in Tower Hamlets.

Empowering Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contribute to the vibrant economy of the borough through employment and economic growth. This scrutiny review considered the issue of empowering SMEs in the context of the Council's Enterprise Strategy, identify what support local SMEs receive and make recommendations to help them flourish further in the borough.

The working group not only collected evidence from officers but also arranged a public meeting to hear from local stakeholders. About 20 stakeholders, including residents, business holders, and representatives from organisations supporting SMEs and the Third Sector, attended. The participants discussed the needs and barriers to the SMEs flourishing and the roles of the Council and the partners to support the sector. The public meeting showed that there was a general feeling that the Council and the partners did not understand the needs and diversity of businesses. The role of large enterprises – how large enterprises and SMEs relate each other to benefit both – was also highlighted.

We have made a number of recommendations around strengthening the link between large enterprises and SMEs in the areas of supply chain, professional advice and lending and engaging the business community further.

Raising participation in post 16 learning in Tower Hamlets

This challenge session examined issues around educational participation of 16-18 year olds in Tower Hamlets and the effectiveness of local strategies to raise post 16 participation. About 30 stakeholders attended, including residents, representatives from schools and Tower Hamlets College, Third Sector organisations that work with young people and Councillors.

Tower Hamlets has a strong record of educational improvement. However, youth unemployment continues to be amongst the highest in London and this educational success is not matched by success in the labour market. Ensuring all young people stay in education and training after the age of 16 is crucial to their development and employability in the future, which could help break the cycle of poverty and mitigate poverty.

As a result of the discussion, six recommendations were made. They included further parental engagement in post 16 education, delivering a range of Level 3 apprenticeships and targeting resources to the most vulnerable learners.

Conclusion

My review and the challenge session undertaken by my predecessor have received significant contribution from local residents. I hope our recommendations support the development of the Enterprise Strategy and also help raise educational achievements post 16.

My portfolio covers housing, environment, arts and leisure. This year I decided to focus on parking and customer care of housing repairs. Parking has been a major issue for residents for some time, with the issue being constantly raised with councillors, and I was keen to explore ways of improving public perceptions on this matter. I was also keen to undertake a scrutiny challenge session on Housing Repairs Service provided by Tower Hamlets Homes because of the significant number of complaints and Members Enquires we receive on this topic.

Customer Care – Tower Hamlets Homes housing repairs service

Disrepair affects the quality of a home and can impact negatively on the quality of life for residents, as community leaders we need to ensure that it doesn't continue to be the case. It was the right time to scrutinise the service as it was about to go forward with a new contract and I wanted to give Members and residents a chance to ensure the new approach addressed the old problems and also that residents were satisfied that they were involved in the procurement of the contract and the delivery of the service.

What emerged from the discussion is a need to work with Members and residents on customer satisfaction and complaints monitoring to improve transparency and to give them confidence in the use of the data. The negative attitude of operatives who undertake repairs has been an underlying concern for residents and continues to be a concern because they have transferred over to be employed under the new contract. Performance measures, IT improvements and structural changes have been put in place to address this. There is a recognition that the new contract needs time to embed and a recommendation has been put forward to report on complaints and customer satisfaction to the Scrutiny Lead for A Great Place to Live as I would like to see this continue to be considered. Many issues were highlighted through the session but were not fully explored due to time constraints. We have recommended that Tower Hamlets Homes continues to explore these with local residents.

The Public Perceptions of Parking

The main aim of the Review was to develop a more sophisticated understanding of residents concerns about parking issues, and use this as a foundation to improve the public perceptions of parking. The Working Group heard evidence from a range of regional and national organisations including the Parking and Traffic Appeals Service, the British Parking Association, Transport for London, London Councils, Westminster Council and Islington Council. In addition, a number of Council services presented evidence on aspects of parking and sustainable forms of transport. To complement this evidence, the Working Group also heard evidence from residents through a resident involvement session and through post and email. The Working Group feels that through incorporating a diverse range of partners in the Review process, the recommendations offer solutions to the complex challenges posed by public perceptions of parking.

The Review made a number of recommendations around the issue of communication which ranges from signage on the streets, the Council's website or the interaction of our Civil Enforcement Officers with the public. It was acknowledged that we need to undertake more work with local residents to change 'car culture' that exists in the borough and promote more sustainable modes of transport.

Conclusion

I believe that both pieces of work will make a positive impact on the service delivery to our residents. The challenge session on Tower Hamlets Homes housing repairs gave Members and residents the confidence that the service recognises some of the problems of the previous contract and that it has begun to address these through the new contract. I believe the recommendations put forward will continue to show that residents and Members concerns are being addressed and further work on areas of concern should produce better results that are much more in line with their expectation.

The public perception of parking is a very important issue, and one that affects all residents regardless of age or whether they drive. We hope that the Review and recommendations will aid the Council in comprehending the way residents understand parking policies. It is through this better understanding that the Council can provide services that best reflect the requirements of the borough.

Safe and Supportive Cllr Lesley Pavitt

The aim of the safe and supportive theme is to create a borough where crime is rare and where everyone has equal access to choices, chances and power. With this in mind, I have used this year's work programme to focus on ways the Council and its partners can safeguard adults at risk of abuse. I also decided to undertake a challenge session to see how we can strengthen the role of the Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) in tackling low level crime which can be a nuisance to the lives of our residents.

Scrutiny Review: Safeguarding Adults at Risk

Our Adults Health & Well Being Services has been rated as 'excellent' for the past six consecutive years. However, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection in November 2009 highlighted safeguarding adults as an area of concern. I was keen to review this to see how we could improve this especially in a period of reduced resources for the public sector. The review looked at the current policies that the Council has and in particular how we could improve the areas of access to services, commissioning and partnership working.

We made visits to Toynbee Hall and Sonali Gardens in order to assess some of the work that was being delivered in the borough. We also held meetings with MIND, Disability Coalition Tower Hamlets, the Metropolitan Police and the Independent Chair of the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Adults Board.

Our recommendations centre on the importance of advocacy working and ensuring that those at risk of abuse are aware of what actually constituted abuse. With self referrals being very low in the borough we also recommended the need to set up a free phone number as an independent point of contact. The Working Group felt that service users should be involved more in service planning rather than being consulted on already written draft policies and in turn should be represented, along with more third sector organisations, on the Safeguarding Adults Board. Finally we noted that not all sections of the community that are at risk may be engaged so a gap analysis should be undertaken to see what hard to reach communities are not being engaged and devising methods of how we can engage with them.

Challenge Session: Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs)

The THEOs were set up to tackle low level anti-social behaviour which blights our community. I spent a morning on the streets with the THEOs to experience first hand the work being delivered. The Challenge Session gave an opportunity to Members and residents to further understand the role of the THEOs in the borough and to identify areas for improvement.

We identified the need for the THEOs to raise their profile and visibility through the publications in local media of the work that they have carried out with a statistical breakdown of their achievements as well as publishing how they differentiate from other local enforcement agencies. Further recommendations included the need to strengthening the THEOs community engagement strategy, particularly to engage Schools and Youth/Community Centres in order to deliver joined up working to resolve local issues. Also recommended was the need for the THEOs to work closer with the Local Area Partnership areas and in particular sharing joint intelligence reports in order to tackle local issues.

Conclusion

I have thoroughly enjoyed being the Scrutiny Lead for Safe and Supportive communities as it has allowed me to explore two key areas which are important for our communities – how we safeguard adults at risk and how we tackle low level anti social behaviour. I believe improving

on the already good work that we've delivered in these areas can support us in developing a safe and supportive community.

My remit focused on ensuring Tower Hamlets is a place people feel a part of and are able to freely live in. Our borough is one of the most diverse in the country and historically was a settling ground for new migrants with the Huguenots, Irish, Jews, Bangladeshis and, more recently, Somalis making the borough their home. It is still a settling ground for new communities and that's why I was keen to look at how we can continue to support new and small communities.

Scrutiny Review: Supporting New Communities, Case Study of the Somali Community

I used the Somali Community as a case study to see how we can continue to support new and small communities considering a period of reduction in resources to the public sector. The key aims of the review included increasing access to services for new communities, increasing voice and representation and also how we can identify the needs of these communities.

I was keen to get residents involved as much as possible in the review and undertook focus groups with older people at luncheon clubs, women at a local community centre, young people from across the borough at the Town Hall and also third sector organisations. I also held meetings with representatives from the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Greater London Authority, Praxis and the Migrants Rights Network to see what was happening across London and the UK.

As part of the recommendations I felt that we needed to strengthen our understanding of new and small communities and we therefore suggested that we develop sophisticated data gathering techniques on the demographics of our communities and use this when we plan services for residents. In terms of access to services and in a period where councils have less money to spend we need to make sure that our mainstream services are inclusive as much as possible and meet the needs of all communities but I also acknowledge that some services still need cater for specific communities. The Council also needs to refresh how we communicate with new communities, particularly those who are hardest to reach. Our upcoming Citizen Engagement Strategy should clearly state how we will do this.

On a final note, community cohesion was an area that many of our residents had concerns about. We need to encourage different communities to engage and work with each other rather than in parallel and isolation to one another. The Working Group has recommended that we promote consortiums of third sector organisations to bid together for funding.

Conclusion

This is an area which I feel very passionate about and it was great to have an opportunity to undertake this review which I feel is very important considering the borough being a settling ground for new communities. I do feel that if these recommendations are met we can have a more cohesive community which all our residents, regardless of whether they are an existing or new, can feel a part of.

The Health Scrutiny Panel undertakes the Council's functions under the Health and Social Care Act, 2001. The Panel includes members who are co-opted from the Tower Hamlets Involvement Network (THINK) to represent patient views as well as our health partners at NHS Tower Hamlets, East London NHS Foundation Trust and Barts and the London NHS Trust (BLT).

This year the Panel looked at maternity services at Barts and the London Trust, complaints, access to GP services, transformation of adult social care and the personalisation agenda, commissioning strategy plan, dementia and the BLT excellence in quality strategy report, all of which are ways of addressing access and improvements in health. Another issue which has been brought to the fore is the health needs of new residents and refugees and we discussed how we can find solutions for improving legitimate access rights for new communities.

Tower Hamlets Involvement Network

This year THINK presented work looking at the views and comments of patients and made a number of improvement recommendations to BLT. Its members serving on the Panel continue to be involved and make a valuable contribution to health scrutiny.

Independent Health Scrutiny Evaluation

Health Scrutiny undertook an independent evaluation in January and February 2010. This evaluation recognised the Health Scrutiny Panel as having a powerful role to play for health issues in Tower Hamlets. Whilst recognising the effective work of the Panel, the evaluation put forward a number of suggestions for improving what we do already and these have been considered in the development of this year's work programme.

Scrutiny challenge session: Cancer- development of early diagnosis and preventative services

In addition to the devastating human impact, cancer also has a significant financial impact on the NHS and the wider economy. Despite the medical advances, health inequalities continue to persist in Tower Hamlets, it has one of the lowest cancer survival rates in the country. Someone living in Tower Hamlets is twice as likely to die prematurely from cancer as someone living in Kensington and Chelsea. The Health Scrutiny Panel felt it was vital to address prevention and diagnosis because of this pressing health inequality.

The Health Scrutiny Panel brought together health colleagues, cancer patients and their carers to explore what can be done to improve survival rates through improving prevention and early diagnosis.

In the challenge session, the Panel considered prevalence of cancer in Tower Hamlets, survival rates and public awareness of cancer in the context of current initiatives to address local issues. They discussed and framed recommendations to improve early diagnosis and intervention, appointments booking system, GP-patient relationship, raising awareness and information and support for patients and their families.

Scrutiny challenge session: Polysystems

In the context of The North East London Case for Change document, (published March 2009) NHS Tower Hamlets set about working with local stakeholders to change the way in which

healthcare is provided. The idea behind the concept of polysystems or consortia, is a group of general practices working together to better meet local needs. Clinical networks (polysystems) include all the people and organisations that can support a patient in the community at every stage of their health journey. Tower Hamlets is a step ahead of other London boroughs, in that its GP practices are already arranged into eight networks.

The Panel considered the development of primary care in Tower Hamlets and the future role of clinical networks and integrated care. Information was presented on the vision for the future, key areas of success already established, clinical networks and care packages, the future role of networks and what would be happening in the year ahead.

The key areas for improvement which were identified included the need for clear and consistent engagement with residents and patients from the Council and the NHS, with Councillors and 3rd Sector Organisations helping to steer understanding and raise the concerns of residents with the correct bodies.

Healthy Lives Healthy People and the NHS White paper – our responses

In our responses to the Government's White papers we have supported the move to increase the potential power local people can have over their health service. We highlighted the importance of the role of scrutiny through local elected members and the importance of identifying local needs and finding local solutions. Whilst we will respond positively, at the same time we think that people need to have confidence in commissioning and the decisions that are made about Tower Hamlets. This can only happen if local people hold decision makers to account through locally elected members. We think that the role of health scrutiny should be further strengthened and look forward to further work on driving improvements in health.

Conclusion

It has been another active year for Health Scrutiny Panel. We have considered a number of key reports through the formal Panel meetings and will continue to develop the Work Programme.

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

If you want to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets, please contact the Scrutiny Policy Team:

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