

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 10 MAY 2011

**M71, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,
LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair)

Councillor Zenith Rahman
Councillor Rachael Saunders
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Fozol Miah

Councillor Peter Golds

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr Mushfique Uddin – (Muslim Community Representative)
Jake Kemp – (Parent Governor Representative)
Rev James Olanipekun – (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Ohid Ahmed
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Kabir Ahmed

Guests Present:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman – (Mayor)

Officers Present:

Afazul Hoque – (Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny & Equalities, Chief Executive's)
David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services (Community), Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Kevan Collins – (Chief Executive)
Aman Dalvi – (Corporate Director, Development & Renewal)
John Coker – (Strategic Housing Manager, Development & Renewal)
Michael Keating – (Service Head, One Tower Hamlets)
Tony Finnegan – (Acting Head of Media, Communications, Chief Executive's)

Chris Saunders	– (Political Advisor to the Labour Group, Chief Executive's)
Robert Driver	– (Communications Officer, Communications, Chief Executive's)
Amanda Thompson	– (Team Leader - Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tim Archer, Ahmed Omer, and Lesley Pavitt.

Councillor Peter Golds was present as a substitute for Councillor Archer.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rabina Khan declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 5.1 on the basis that she was a Member of the Cabinet when the original decision was taken, and she left the room during the Committee's decision making and voting on this item.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton declared a personal interest in agenda item 5.1 as she was the ward councillor.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 April 2011 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

None.

5. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

5.1 Report Called In - Disposal of 63a Sewardstone Road (The Stables)

Further to her respective declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest, Councillor Rabina Khan left the room during the Committee's decision making and voting on this item.

Mayor Lutfur Rahman who had not been present for the previous agenda item also left the room during this time.

Prior to the presentation of the call-in the Committee heard representation from the Grand Union Housing Co-operative (GUHC) who were proposing to purchase the property at market value.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton, on behalf of the call-in Members, then detailed the reasons for the Call-in, expressing her concern at the length of time it had taken a decision to reach Cabinet and the potential effect it would have on the current occupants of the site.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Rabina Khan, supported by Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director, Development and Renewal, and John Coker, Strategic Housing Manager, responded on behalf of the Cabinet commenting that the option of the Council continuing the original process of disposal to GUC for the nominal sum of £1 was no longer legally possible as the Disposal Consents had been changed since that original decision. Property held in the HRA must be shown to achieve best value, and an open market sale would provide additional transparency to the disposal process.

Councillor Khan stated that the Service Head, Asset Management, considered that the most appropriate method of disposal in this case was by auction and the GUHC were welcome to make a bid.

In response to questions Councillor Khan advised that there was a combination of exceptional factors which had led to the failure of the 2001 decision not being implemented. These factors included the property being squatted, the development of the ALMO and lengthy court delays in gaining possession.

The original decision to dispose of the property for a nominal sum was arrived at on the basis that GUC would use 63a Sewardstone Road as office accommodation, and nominations would be provided to the council from a number of other properties made available through refurbishments resulting from the sale.

After considering the views and comments made by the Members presenting the call-in, the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Rabina Khan, and the officers, the Committee

RESOLVED

to refer the matter back to the Cabinet with a request that further consideration be given to the following alternative course of action proposed by the call-in Members:

That a long leasehold interest in the property at 63a Sewardstone Road be sold to the Grand Union Cooperative based on market value at current

designation taking into account their reasonable costs for maintenance and expenditure on the property, with nomination rights to the social tenancy of a 2/3 bedroom property.

6. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

The Chair invited Mayor Lutfur Rahman, supported by the Council's Chief Executive, Kevan Collins, to address the Committee in his first Scrutiny Spotlight as Executive Mayor.

Mayor Rahman thanked Members of the Committee for their excellent work over the past year, and stressed that the role of Overview and Scrutiny and their contributions had helped to ensure that residents got the excellent services they deserved.

The Mayor referred to the coalition government's spending review and benefit changes which were negatively affecting a large section of local residents, especially those most vulnerable, and advised that despite these challenges, council tax had been frozen for the second consecutive year, key frontline services such as libraries, youth services and after schools facilities had been safeguarded, and Tower Hamlets was the only council in the country not charging for homecare.

A programme of transformation had been implemented which was designed to make the organisation more lean, flexible and citizen centred:

HOUSING

- In 2010/11, 737 new affordable homes have been delivered – while an additional 310 affordable homes would be delivered within the next few months
- 214 of these were socially rented family sized homes.
- £4.3 million of extra funding secured through the New Homes Bonus based on our 2009/10 housing delivery performance – the best result nationally.
- £94.5 million worth of Decent Homes money secured for investment in council housing over the next five years
- Ocean Estate - 497 units have had their internal refurbishment works completed
- Blackwall Reach - 1,600 new homes, and the creation of new open spaces and better shops and community facilities.

EMPLOYMENT

- 4,374 jobs provided through the Working Neighbourhoods Fund

- The new Employment Strategy would be agreed by Cabinet on 11th May.
- Priority for residents to access 1000 Olympics jobs.
- £4 million external funding for 'the High Street 2012 Project'

EDUCATION/ YOUTH

- Achievement of 5 or more A*- C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths has gone up to 51.8%.
- Reduction in the number of NEETs – down to just 5.3%.
- No cuts in youth services provision
- No reduction in the number of front line staff working with vulnerable young people, those at risk of crime, substance misuse or teenage pregnancy
- St Paul's Way Trust School opened in January 2011.
- £60 million secured for secondary school refurbishment
- 2 million visits to Idea Stores and libraries in the last year - the loan of CDs and DVDs would now be free.
- Idea Store Watney Market – due to open in the summer of 2012.

COMMUNITY SAFETY/ COHESION

- Violent crime down by 17.29%, including Gun Crime down by 46%.
- 409 arrests made under the Council funded 'Dealer a Day' initiative.
- The taskforce and deployment of the 21 additional police officers is progressing. A management team from the Partnership has been formed - the Inspector for the team and 14 constables have been appointed.

ENVIRONMENT

- Recycling had shown a massive improvement from 9% in 2005/2006 to 26.51% in 2009/10.
- A £12 million project to improve Victoria Park for current and future generations was underway.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- 29.6% decrease in the under 18 conception rate; compared with a London decrease of 20.3% and a national decrease of 18.1%.
- Targets for residents stopping smoking had been exceeded

- Council judged to be 'overall performing excellently' for the 7th year in succession by the Care Quality Commission, placing Tower Hamlets within the top 5 Councils in the country with Adult Social Services Responsibility.

ARTS, HERITAGE AND LEISURE

- The refurbished Bancroft Library had been reopened
- The refurbishment of Poplar Baths was well under way

In conclusion the Mayor stated that One Tower Hamlets – reducing inequality, fostering community cohesion and building community leadership – remained even more vital and he would continue to strive for the very best for the Borough.

The following question and answer session was centred on the reorganisation of the existing two Council directorates of Children, Schools and Families and Adults, Health and Wellbeing into one new unified directorate with one Executive Director.

The Mayor stressed that the safeguarding of both vulnerable adults and children was paramount, and no appointment would be made unless the candidate was exceptional.

The Chief Executive advised that many other authorities had already made the change with excellent results, and he was confident that the core processes currently in place could be built upon in order to achieve this. Ensuring the safety of vulnerable adults and children was not down to just one director, but to the work of the staff below them as well.

Members of the Committee also asked questions in relation to Mayoral decision-making, Community Land Trusts, crime and disorder, Rich Mix, unemployment and overcrowding.

The Chair thanked the Mayor and the Chief Executive for their presentation and their responses to questions.

7. PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

The Chair welcomed Paul Ricketts, Borough Commander, and Gavin Dooley from the Council's Community Safety team, to the Committee's first partnership scrutiny session.

The Chair advised that anti-social-behaviour (ASB) and the fear of crime was a priority for residents, and had been identified as the greatest area for public concern in the Annual Residents Survey.

Commander Ricketts referred to the latest individual crime statistics for Tower Hamlets which unfortunately had increased from the previous year, however these were still considerable lower than those of 5 years previously.

ASB could not be tackled in isolation as drug crime for example often led to other types of crime such as burglary and robbery. The impact of the recession on individuals wellbeing could also be linked to the rises in crime.

Commander Ricketts outlined the following future challenges and opportunities:

- The impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review – 20% cuts in resources
- MPS TP Change programme
- Safer Neighbourhood Review
- Public Access Review (Front office reductions)
- Community Safety Partnership restructure (VOLT)
- Localisation Agenda and the relocation of co-enforcement officers within the community
- Partnership Task Force (ASB and Drugs harm reduction)

Mr Dooley reported that improved partnership working had resulted in:

- Borough-wide drinking control zone
- Saturation Policy for Brick Lane town Centre
- Introduction of multi-agency group to deal with entrenched street drinkers & drug users
- Improved performance regarding reported crime & ASB
- Improved Annual Residence Survey results

Mr Dooley further advised that the Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOS) would focus on:

- Youth related anti-social behaviour
- Street Drinking & disorder
- Dog fouling
- Littering, graffiti and fly-posting
- Illegal street trading

In response to questions Commander Ricketts advised that although 24hr police stations provided reassurance for people, there was also a need to keep officers on the streets, however other options such as neighbourhood

surgeries would help close the gap. The feasibility of a new custody suite at Limehouse police station was currently being assessed, as well as a police presence at the Royal London Hospital. While uniformed officers were generally considered to be a deterrent to crime, this had to be weighed up against the whole range of crime that was tackled by plain-clothed officers.

The Chair thanked Commander Ricketts and Mr Dooley for their attendance and response to questions.

8. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

8.1 Scrutiny Challenge Session: Customer Care - Tower Hamlets Homes Housing Repairs Service

The Chair introduced the report detailing the outcome of the scrutiny challenge session on the repairs service offered by Tower Hamlets Homes.

The session was structured to allow for dialogue between those who were raising concerns and those providing the repairs service. Residents and Councillors used the time to discuss their concerns and made suggestions for addressing these.

The Chair **Moved** and it was

RESOLVED

That the recommendations contained within the report be agreed.

8.2 Public Perceptions of Parking - Report of the Scrutiny Working Group

The Chair introduced the report and recommendations of the Public Perceptions of Parking Scrutiny Working Group, the aim of which had been to develop a more sophisticated understanding of residents concerns about parking issues.

The Chair **moved** and it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be agreed.
- (2) That the Service Head for One Tower Hamlets be authorised to amend the draft report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for A Great Place to Live.

8.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2010/2011

The Chair introduced the report which provided a summary of the work undertaken by the Committee and Scrutiny Lead Members during the municipal year 2010/1, and formed the basis of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual report that would be reported to a future Council meeting.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

- 1) That the report be submitted to Full Council.
- 2) That the Service Head, One Tower Hamlets be authorised to amend the final report before its submission to Council, after consultation with the Chair and relevant Scrutiny Leads.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) CABINET PAPERS

None received.

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

Resolved:

That in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of the Section Two business on the grounds that it contained information defined as exempt or confidential in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government, Act 1972.

The meeting ended at 9.10 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Ann Jackson
Overview & Scrutiny Committee