

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Report No.</b>	<b>Agenda Item No.</b>
<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>7<sup>th</sup> June 2011</b>	<b>Unrestricted</b>		<b>10.1</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Service Head, One Tower Hamlets		<b>Title:</b> Supporting New Communities, Case Study of the Somali Community - Report of the Scrutiny Working Group		
<b>Originating Officer(s):</b> Mohammed Ahad Scrutiny Policy Officer		<b>Ward(s) affected:</b> All		

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Supporting New Communities, Case Study of the Somali Community Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## 2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Agree the draft report and the recommendations contained in it.
- 2.2 Authorise the Service Head for One Tower Hamlets to amend the draft report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for One Tower Hamlets.

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### LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (AS AMENDED) SECTION 100D

#### ***LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT***

Background paper

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

None

N/A

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Tower Hamlets has one of the most diverse communities in the country, its demographics have changed dramatically in the past half century with the Huguenots, Irish, Jews, Bangladeshis and, more recently the Somali community making the borough their home. The purpose of this review was to consider the efficiency savings and look at how the Council and partners meet the needs of new communities that settle in the borough and how it also continues to meet the requirements of the borough's smaller existing communities. The review used the Somali Community as a case study and examined three key areas:
- Identify methods of increasing access to service provisions for new communities
  - Increase the voice and representation of new communities, particular in community leadership positions
  - Examine how the Partnership can continue to meet the needs of new communities considering a period of efficiency savings
- 3.2 A key aspect for the review was to engage with residents as much as possible and to hear their concerns. Focus groups were held with older Somali people at luncheon clubs, with young people who attend local youth centres women and also third sector organisations. The Working Group also received evidence from a range of local, regional and national organisations including the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Greater London Authority, Praxis and the Migrants Rights Network. In addition, Members heard from a range of Council Officers.
- 3.3 This was a particularly challenging review for the Working Group who noted that there are no easy solutions for some of their key findings in particular in the current economic climate. The Working Group therefore have identified some fundamental issues that the Council and Partnership should focus on to help new and minority communities better settle and integrate with the wider community. This area of work will need continuous focus and attention and the Working Group were keen to ensure that this review has helped to raise this issue to the forefront of the Mayor's agenda
- 3.4 Our recommendations include strengthening our understanding of the needs of new communities. It was suggested that sophisticated data gathering techniques should be developed on the demographics of our communities and to use this when planning services for residents. In terms of access to services and in a period where Councils have less money, it was important to make sure that mainstream services were inclusive and were meeting the needs of all communities, it was however noted that some specialised services were still needed to cater for specific communities.
- 3.5 Issues of unemployment within new and small communities were highlighted by both Members and residents on a number of occasions and it was felt that the pending Employment Strategy should clearly outline what support would be given to those from new and small communities. Recommendations also

included the Council needing to refresh how it communicates with new communities, particularly those who are hardest to reach. The upcoming Citizen Engagement Strategy should clearly outline how this will be done

- 3.6 On a final note, community cohesion was an area that many residents had concerns about. There was a need to encourage different communities to engage and work with each other rather than in parallel and isolation to one another. The Working Group recommends that the Council and the Council for Voluntary Services promote consortiums of third sector organisations to bid together for funding.
- 3.7 The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.8 Once agreed, the Working Groups report will be submitted to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations.

#### **4. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)**

- 4.1 The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for the Executive to provide a response.
- 4.2 The report recommends action by the Council to support new communities in Tower Hamlets. In a general sense this is consistent with the Council's aspiration, expressed in the Community Plan, to achieve One Tower Hamlets, a borough in which everyone has an equal stake and status. It is possible that action consistent with the recommendations may be supportable by reference to the Council's well-being power in section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. It may also be consistent with the Council's duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, pursuant to which the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the following –
  - The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
  - The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.
  - The need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. This requires consideration be given to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

## **5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer**

- 5.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Supporting New Communities, Case Study of the Somali Community Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.2 Recent government announcements about funding reductions to the Council in 2010-11 and for the next four years will affect any recommendations agreed and any additional costs that arise from the recommendations must be contained within directorate revenue budgets. Also, officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

## **6. One Tower Hamlets consideration**

- 6.1 The recommendations within this report aim to reduce inequalities within the borough by both looking at methods of meeting the needs of new and small communities and also recommending that services consider how they can be more inclusive.
- 6.2 Specific recommendations focus on community cohesion and the Council's role in encouraging communities to integrate with one another, particular those from the Somali and Bangladeshi Communities as it was felt that these two communities were living in parallel to one another.
- 6.3 The importance of encouraging greater community leadership from new and small communities were also recommended and the notion that those from these communities should be capacity built to undertake governance positions within the borough.

## **7. Risk Management**

- 7.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the Working Group's report or recommendations.