

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council
May 2011**



TOWER HAMLETS

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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 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.

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' because of concerns 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 Scrutiny Lead and usually include one in-depth review, as well as other shorter pieces of work.

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 sessions with the Mayor and Cabinet Members
- A Health Scrutiny Panel to respond to consultation from NHS Trusts

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 respectively.

As well as the councillors, there are six co-opted positions on the Committee, including three positions for parent governors. The other representatives are 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 and therefore has no voting rights.

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 areas of responsibility reflect 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.
- 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.

Each Lead actively promotes 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. 'Scrutiny Challenge Sessions' which are one-off meetings looking at a specific area of concern within the community and designed to consider within a shorter period of time 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 – Liberal Democrats

Cllr Harun Miah - May 2010 – October 2010 – Respect

Cllr Fozol Miah – March 2011 – May 2011 – Respect

Their contribution to budget scrutiny, call-ins, scrutiny spotlights and performance monitoring has been very useful in holding the Executive to account and ensuring that our services meet our residents' needs.

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, including the provision of hospital and GP services and health promotion and prevention work. It can

¹ Cllr Saunders succeeded Cllr Rabina Khan as the Scrutiny Lead in November 2010.
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scrutinise how services are planned and provided and how the views of local people are built into the provision.

The National Health Service 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. This means Health Scrutiny will continue to have a key role in holding decision makers to account and ensuring 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

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 witnessed strong 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. Secondly, a number of deputations were made by members of the public at Committee, usually related to the call-ins.

Performance Monitoring

We monitor the Strategic Plan and Corporate Revenue Monitoring report every quarter and twice a year 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. At our final meeting we also held a Scrutiny Spotlight on the Borough Commander and we highlighted a number of issues to him including the need to involve residents on review of access to police services and Safer Neighbourhood Team and the importance of continuous engagement to drive down crime in the borough. I think that OSC needs to build on this and further develop the accountability of partners.

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 in 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**

We 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 where more attention was needed 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 policies around reducing 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 development plan arising from the Core Strategy should engage local residents at a level they can easily understand.

- **Local Implementation Plan 2**

We recommended that the Cabinet 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 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 bus services 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 considered the following other policy areas and comments and recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

- **Car Free Development**

The Committee followed up work undertaken in 2009/10 around local concerns about car free development and the availability of street parking permits. 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 errors where residents in a car free development have been issued street parking permits
- 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. We noted its sophisticated analysis of unemployment in the borough and the impact on our diverse communities. The Committee raised a number of points about shaping the future job market, the importance of raising aspirations and linking up with local schools, colleges and universities, continuing to develop 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 and 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 into our education targets and encouraging entrepreneurship and apprenticeships. We also recommended that engagement with residents is crucial in delivering our transformation programme and 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 on the evaluation of the Healthy Borough Programme and how the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Programme creates more sports spaces and better dining facilities. The Committee noted that the proposals in the Public Health White Paper provide an opportunity to continue some of the Healthy Borough Programme. Once all the evaluation work has been completed a report pulling together all the highlights and evidence of learning with a set of recommendations could influence future strategic direction. As the BSF Programme was in its infancy it was too early to realise the full 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 within the school environment.

Scrutiny of the Budget

The scrutiny of the budget proposals this year became crucial as the public sector faced the most severe reductions in 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 and highlighted the importance of informing and engaging residents about the budget proposals to ensure they better understood our decisions and have an opportunity to contribute to them. We also suggested that the Mayor review the Council's accommodation strategy 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 a detailed discussion about the impact on local residents of the budget reductions and have recommended that the Mayor work with the Committee next year to start developing a more sophisticated understanding 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 by commenting on 37 Cabinet reports (compared to 23 last year). Among these were:

- The Lettings Policy and Plan
- Council Housing Finance Reforms
- The Housing Strategy
- Poplar Bath Procurement Route
- The Conservation Strategy
- Neighbourhood Shops Policy
- Determination of School Admission Arrangements
- Local Development Framework
- Local Implementation Plan 2
- Borough Wide Drinking Control Zones
- The 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 about whether to call-in reports or not.

Call-ins

The Committee has considered six call-ins this year, in line with the last two years and 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 and Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) | Confirmed |
| Children, Schools and Families - Contract Awards | Confirmed |
| Leasehold Policy Review | Referred back to Cabinet |
| Commercial Activities in Victoria Park | Referred back to Cabinet |
| Disposal of 63a Sewardstone Road (The Stables) | Referred back to Cabinet |

Call-in debates are always robust and rigorous and during 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 change their original decision including looking to limit the number of commercial and non-commercial event days in Victoria Park, closing time reduced further, replace a dance event with a more family orientated event and that officers continue to monitor levels of disturbance to local residents.

This will significantly reduce any adverse impact on local residents and by addressing some of their concerns.

It is also worth highlighting that during call-in debates attendance by local people and other councillors increased substantially. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny by highlighting its important role 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 and we have supported them throughout the year to develop their role and help them be more effective. They received an Induction Session which also included presentation from our Children, Schools and Families Directorate. The Parent Governors also have a slot at the quarterly briefing provided by the Director of Children, Schools & Families to all school governors. The aim of this is to build a relationship between the Committee and the wider schools community. 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 would like to continue to build on this next year, strengthening the role of co-opted Members to help us further engage more local residents 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 each Scrutiny Lead Member revisited a review from his/her 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 re-visited were:

- 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 about these are 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 local residents, former councillors (both of whom had Chaired Overview and Scrutiny Committee) from Newham and Lewisham, officers from Hackney and the Greater London Assembly. We also considered evidence from other Mayoral authorities across the country.

The over-arching message focused on 'developing a borough with a strong culture of accountability'. This is particularly important given the change in decision making along with a number of national policy change including the performance management framework and the demise of Comprehensive Area Assessment. Developing the accountability culture is about 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.

My work programme this year focused 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

Citizen Engagement Strategy

This review examined the development of the Citizen Engagement Strategy to ensure we develop a robust tool for engaging local residents in our partnership work. The aim of the strategy is to create a more 'powerful public' and outline how citizens can participate and engage with the decision-making process that impact on their lives and local communities and take greater control over those issues. Citizen engagement in this strategy means not only the sharing of 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.

Participants in the review agreed with the value and importance of citizen engagement. They highlighted the importance of ensuring all sections of the communities were represented and heard. The role of local councillors in bringing together different stakeholders to find solutions to local issues was crucial in engaging a diverse group of residents.

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

I chaired a challenge session to consider how we can provide efficient and effective access to customer services for all our residents. 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 session noted the importance of internet based services to reduce cost and maintain quality service. However, approximately a third of our residents do not have internet access and many do not have the necessary IT skills to access such services. It was therefore important to develop internet based services with support available for residents to access those services. Working in partnership with third sector organisations and registered social landlords is also important to improve access to services.

Conclusion

The recommendations from the review and challenge session will improve dialogue between the Council (and partners) and residents/customers, which I believe will enhance our understanding of their needs and help develop more responsive services.

I was appointed to the position of the Scrutiny Lead for Prosperous Community in November 2010 and I led a scrutiny review on how the Council can better support small and medium size businesses. With the reduction in public spending and its impact on loss of jobs, it is more important than ever to do all we can to support businesses to grow, for the sake of jobs and to build a mixed economy that a strong community needs to be built on. 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 discussed the needs and barriers to SMEs flourishing and how the borough can better support the sector. The public meeting highlighted 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 and how they relate to SMEs to benefit both was also discussed.

We have made 12 recommendations with a focus 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 in policy or service change.

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, Tower Hamlets College and Third Sector organisations that work with young people.

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 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 and 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 has detrimental impact on the quality of life for residents and as community leaders we need to ensure that it doesn't continue to be the case. A new contractor had been procured and important to ensure the new contractor addressed the old problems and check whether residents were satisfied that they were involved in the procurement of the contract and the delivery of the service.

What emerged is a need to work more closely with Members and residents on customer satisfaction and complaints monitoring to improve transparency and to give them confidence in challenging the data. The negative attitude of operatives who undertake repairs has been an underlying concern for residents and continues to be 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. Many issues were highlighted through the session but were not fully explored due to time constraints and we have recommended that these continue to be explored 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 from residents through a focus group 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 and hope the Mayor and his Cabinet fully consider the issues highlighted by our reports.

Safe and Supportive Cllr Lesley Pavitt

I have used my work programme to focus on ways the Council and its partners can safeguard adults at risk of abuse. I also undertook a challenge session on 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 Working Group visited a local day centre and also spoke to representatives from MIND and the Disability Coalition. We heard concerns around difficulty in speaking out about abuse as there was no independent point of contact. Clarity around what constituted abuse was difficult to understand for vulnerable residents. It was also noted that users were not involved in this important area and there needs to be greater engagement in service planning.

Our recommendations centre on the importance of advocacy working and raising awareness. 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 represented, along with third sector organisations, on the Safeguarding Adults Board. Finally we noted that not all sections of the community 'at risk' may be engaged and therefore 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 and I spent a morning on the streets with them to experience first hand how they work. The Challenge Session then gave us an opportunity to explore this further and 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. We also highlighted the importance of strengthening their community engagement strategy, particularly with Schools and Youth/Community Centres in order to deliver joined up working to resolve local issues. Finally, we have recommended the THEOs to work closely with existing local forums 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. I believe improving on the already good work that we have delivered in these areas can support us in developing a safe and supportive community.

My portfolio focuses 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 has been a settling ground for new migrants. I therefore focused my review looking at how the Council and Partners can support new 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. We 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 elsewhere in London and the UK.

The views and concerns of residents have been fundamental in shaping our findings and recommendations. We noted the need to strengthen our understanding of new and small communities and have 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 the public sector finance has been reduced, we need to make sure that our mainstream services are inclusive as much as possible and meet the needs of all communities but we also acknowledge that some services still need to cater for specific communities. The Partnership also needs to refresh how we communicate with new communities, particularly those who are hardest to reach. Our upcoming Citizen Engagement Strategy should clearly outline how we will do this.

Community cohesion is 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 with the focus on strengthening relationship between our diverse communities.

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 diversity of the borough. I hope this piece of work helps create the momentum for the Partnership to really focus on the needs and aspirations of new and minority communities.

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 and works in partnership with 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

We have developed a strong working relationship with THINK and the Co-opted Members serving on the Panel continue to be involved and make valuable contribution to our work. We have considered each other's work programmes to avoid duplication and explore areas for joint work. We have also considered their report from 2010 highlighting comments and recommendations from service users and also the response to these from health service providers. This has been extremely useful for us as it has brought peoples real experience to the forefront of our agenda. We are extremely grateful to THINK for bringing a number of other local health issues to us particularly around difficulties in accessing local health services. We hope this partnership work continues as we transfer to the establishment of Health Watch.

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.

We 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 we considered prevalence of cancer in Tower Hamlets, survival rates and public awareness of cancer in the context of current initiatives to address local issues. Recommendations were framed 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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