

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2011

**ROOM M71, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON,
E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair)
Councillor Tim Archer
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Amy Whitelock
Councillor Zenith Rahman
Councillor Helal Uddin

Councillor Judith Gardiner, substituting for Councillor Rachael Saunders

Mr Mushfique Uddin – (Muslim Community Representative)
Canon Michael Ainsworth – (Church of England Diocese Representative)
Memory Kampiyawo – Education Representative
Jake Kemp – (Parent Governor Representative)
Rev James Olanipekun – (Parent Governor Representative)

Guests Present:

Councillor Shahed Ali – (Cabinet Member for Environment)

Officers Present:

David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services (Community), Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Isabella Freeman – (Assistant Chief Executive - Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Michael Keating – (Service Head, One Tower Hamlets)
Sarah Barr – (Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer, Strategy Policy and Performance, One Tower Hamlets, Chief Executive's)

Antonella Burgio – (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Co-opted Member Jake Kemp and Councillor Rachel Saunders. Councillor Saunders was represented at the meeting by Councillor Judith Gardner.

John Williams Service Head, Democratic Services apologised that he was unable to attend to present the report at agenda item 6.2.

Councillor Sirajul Islam gave apologies for leaving early.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of personal or prejudicial interests were made.

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 6th September 2 011 be approved and signed by the Chair has a correct record of proceedings.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

5. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

5.1 Call-In - Recording / Webcasting of Council Meetings

The Chair invited Councillor Joshua Peck, on behalf of the call-in Members, to present the reasons for the call-in requisition. Councillor Peck highlighted the following issues:

- Full Council had decided that residents should be able to view Council meetings, and officers were instructed to prepare options for how this could be done. He had been surprised when Cabinet decided not to go ahead with the webcasting.
- The costs of the proposal were not significant
- The Call-In had identified 2 options for finding the funds – not recruiting to the Mayoral Communications Advisor post and returning the Mayor's leased car.

In response to questions from the Committee, Councillor Peck provided the following information:

- Webcasting Council meetings would probably help improve make everyone's behaviour.

- Many other local authorities webcast meetings and this also provides a good record of Council meetings, which would be useful for the business of the Standards Committee.
- Councillor Peck was in favour of at least using the existing system and any measure which improved accountability and transparency.
- Option 3 would be the best one for people with hearing problems. This option also encouraged feedback from viewers. Councillor Peck had some concerns around the potential for improper usage of the material, but welcomed any development which improved accountability of what happens in the Council chamber.
- Webcasting might discourage some young people from engaging with politics, but also might engage others. At the very least it could help demystify the local democratic process -as evidenced by the broadcasting of Parliament.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) responded to the matters raised advising the Committee that she was unable to comment on behalf of the Executive but was willing to discuss the options in more detail. In discussion the Committee received the following information:

- There were concerns about using the existing system (Option 1 in the report) because of its age. The quality of voice recording was poor and the cameras were fixed. Regarding audibility, the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) agreed to ask Democratic Services to look into improving the microphone system in the Chamber.

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- Option 3 would cost £25K per annum, and would give the best results.
- Officer research suggested that 6 out of 32 London boroughs webcast meetings. Of other authorities questioned, viewing figures were 'low', with Kent having less than 100 live viewers, Thanet an average of 120, Braintree an average of 120.
- People could tamper or play with footage, although this would be harder to do with option 3.
- Members would need training in relation to ethical matters such as defamation.
- It was felt that that webcasting would likely improve behaviour in the chamber.

In response to the Committee's questions the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) provided the following information:

- In clarification of the necessary finances, particularly for maintaining the current system and those for option 3, the Committee was informed that current costs were very low.
- Regarding the suggestion that switching on the present equipment (option 1) could improve behaviour immediately, the Committee was informed

that this outcome was not guaranteed as it was not always possible to see or hear who was talking.

- Regarding whether Council's resolution to record meetings should have already been implemented using current equipment, the Committee was informed that to undertake this still required an Executive decision.
- Regarding reasons for the omitting to mention in the Cabinet report the national trend amongst public bodies towards broadcasting of meetings and increasing transparency, accountability, openness and engagement with citizens, the Committee was informed that the report had been commissioned to look at equipment options only.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) and Councillor Peck retired from the meeting. The Committee discussed the responses that had been given by them and concluded that the following concerns remained:

- All residents should be able to see Council meetings, improving transparency, accountability and citizen engagement with local decision-making.
- Further weight should be given to the equality impacts: webcasting of council meetings would increase access for disabled and elderly people unable to travel to the Town Hall, young people, and residents who are working when meetings are taking place.
- Full Council has already passed a resolution that meetings should be broadcast and this decision should be enacted. Cabinet was tasked to review this when Councillors from across the chamber agreed that Council should endeavour to have the meetings broadcast. The Committee was concerned that this decision has been ignored by the Executive, and also that it had taken so long to get to this point.
- The Committee also noted the lack of reference to the Government's view about the greater need to hold public bodies to account, which broadcasts would go some way towards satisfying. The political environment in Tower Hamlets would suggest that viewing figures for webcasts of meetings could be higher than other areas canvassed by officers. Benchmarking information from other local authorities was therefore not deemed to be relevant.
- The Committee were moved to ask that the sound recording equipment be used for the next meeting.
- A complete record of meetings would encourage Members to improve their behaviour in Council meetings, a matter which was of increasing concern to members of the Committee.
- As it would be his decision to spend £25k on Option 3; the Committee asked the Mayor to reduce non-essential costs by not recruiting to the communication post that he had recently created and returning the new Mayoral car. This was seen as a reasonable request set against the fact that more residents would be able to see and hear what goes on at Council.
- The Committee was concerned that the officers' report did not set out all the advantages and disadvantages of each option. While Option 4 (to not

do anything) was presented very positively, other options were described negatively.

Members of the Committee agreed to refer Cabinet's provisional decision back asking that further consideration to the views and concerns presented. These were that:

- Having considered the arguments, the Committee was of the view that Option 3 was therefore the best option – this would enable a good service, improving audibility and access to council meetings and maximising citizen engagement. The option could be funded by not recruiting to the Mayoral communications advisor and/or by the returning of the Mayor's car.
- In the meantime, the Committee wished to propose that the existing system be returned to use immediately.

RESOLVED

That the call-in of Cabinet report "Recording / Webcasting Council Meetings" be referred back to Cabinet for further consideration on the basis of the above concerns.

6. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Disposal of Northumberland Wharf Waste Transfer Station

In accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Terms of Reference, Article 6.02 (ii) of the Council's Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wished to consider key issues in relation to the report on Disposal of Northumberland Wharf Waste Transfer Station which was to be discussed by Cabinet on 5th October 2011.

Jamie Blake, Service Head, Public Realm, and Councillor Shahed Ali, Cabinet Member for Environment, presented the report circulated as agenda item 6.1. The Committee was informed that in the past, Northumberland Wharf had been used for the waterborne transit of the borough's waste to landfill sites. Usage had declined over the years as a result of Government directives on waste which required councils to move away from the use of landfill to other more environmentally friendly methods.

As part of its Waste Strategy, the Council was looking to develop long-term approaches to waste disposal and wanted the site to be used for long-term strategic planning. Options to save site maintenance costs were being explored, including a medium term lease. The Committee was asked to note that the continued operation of the recycling centre located at the site would form part of the terms of the lease.

In response to Members' questions, the Committee received the following information:

- Access to the recycling centre would remain free to borough residents.
- In the event that a tenant could not be found, the Council proposed to shut down the site. The recycling centre would continue and its operator, Veolia, would assist in any reconfiguration required.
- As waste wharves were rare and Northumberland wharf was a protected site, attracting potential tenants would be challenging. Although the Council was pursuing likely tenants who would continue to use the wharf should none be found, the facility could possibly be closed down in lieu of future use and the remainder of the site used for storage.
- Regarding the feasibility of retaining the site for waste removal purposes, even with reduced volumes, the Committee was informed that the Government had offered incentives for reducing landfill therefore usage of the wharf had reduced.
- To reduce its exposure to Government landfill escalators, the Council had negotiated with Veolia to dispose of waste through incineration and increased recycling. The borough's waste would be driven to two processing sites in South London to reduce the need for waste transfer and these costs.
- The Council operated weekly refuse and recycling collections. Therefore there were no local implications arising from the Government's recent announcement to support the reinstatement of weekly refuse collections.
- The report asked Cabinet for permission to go to market to realise some income from the site and avoid upkeep costs that would otherwise be incurred. However, should tenants from the waste industry not be found, the authority would be willing to look at other uses for the site.
- It was not the Council's intention to sell the site as after 2017 it would need to look at new waste disposal contracts and future trends in waste disposal might again render the site useful.
- Waste Management industry trends were away from landfill and towards investing in modern waste technology methods, building PFI and incineration facilities. Pilot plants were being trialled at present and it was the Service Head's view that these would be scaled up once technological developments permitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

6.2 Appointments to Inner North East London Standing Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

David Galpin, Head Of Legal Services-Community, presented the report on behalf of John Williams, Service Head Democratic Services.

The Council had established a Standing Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Health with neighbouring boroughs of Hackney and Newham and the City of London. The Committee was requested to appoint 3 members to represent Tower Hamlets on this body (2 from the majority Labour group and 1 from the minority Conservative group) drawn from the membership of

Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health Scrutiny Panel. Nominations had been sought from the political groups.

The Chair advised that Councillor Rachel Saunders (Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel) and Lesley Pavitt of the Labour group and Councillor Dr Emma Jones of the Conservative group were nominated to serve. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Archer and there, being no objections it was

RESOLVED

That Councillors Rachael Saunders, Lesley Pavitt and Dr Emma Jones be appointed as the Council's representatives on the Inner North East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

Nil items.

8. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The following updates were given by Members of the Committee regarding their scrutiny lead areas:

Councillor Zenith Rahman informed the committee that events for Black History Month were being held at Whitechapel Idea Store. Committee Members were invited to support the events.

Councillor Sirajul Islam was looking at reviews on asset management and resources and was shortly to meet to the corporate director.

Councillor Sirajul Islam left the meeting at 8:13 p.m.

Councillor Amy Whitelock was investigating how the new model children's centres would operate and planned to meet with the corporate director on this matter. She intended that this would inform a scrutiny review. Regarding recent media attention on the matter of low adoption rates, Councillor Whitehouse had noted that the borough had amongst the lowest rates; she therefore intended to investigate this. The Committee was also informed that Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service had been invited to attend the Health Scrutiny Panel's meeting on 18th October.

Councillor Helal Uddin reported that he was exploring the development of housing forums, looking at matters involving section 106 agreements, and was involved in a joint Health Scrutiny meeting investigating housing policy for people with mental health problems.

Councillor Tim Archer informed the Committee that he was due to explore the publication costs of East End Life.

RESOLVED

That the verbal updates be noted.

9. ANY OTHER SECTION ONE (UNRESTRICTED) BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

Arising from issues of behaviour discussed earlier in the meeting as part of the Call-in report , the Chair raised her concerns on the matter of some Members' behaviour at Council meetings. The Chair requested that the following referral be made to the Council's Standards Committee:

The Chair stated that she had become increasingly unhappy with some Members' behaviour which she considered unacceptable. This had recently escalated to a level which was now a major concern and was affecting all Members' conduct at Council meetings and elsewhere. For this reason the Chair requested that the Council's Standards Committee compile and produce a plain English guide outlining acceptable behaviour of Council Members, to include what is unacceptable and how to proceed if they had been adversely affected by others' behaviour. The Chair requested, if possible, that this report be presented to the next meeting of the Council by the Chair of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED

That the matter of Members' behaviour at Council meetings be referred to the Chair of Standards Committee.

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The meeting ended at 8.19 p.m.

Chair, **Councillor Ann Jackson**
Overview & Scrutiny Committee