

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 PM ON TUESDAY, 8 MAY 2012

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

Members Present:

Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair)
Councillor Rachael Saunders (Vice-Chair) Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Sirajul Islam Councillor Zenith Rahman Councillor Amy Whitelock
Councillor Helal Uddin

Councillor David Snowdon (in place of Councillor Tim Archer)

Mayor Lutfur Rahman (Mayor)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Alibor Choudhury

Co-opted Members Present:

Memory Kampiyawo – (Parent Governor Representative)
Rev James Olanipekun – (Parent Governor Representative)

Guests Present:

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Officers Present:

David Galpin – (Head of Legal Services (Community), Legal Services, Chief Executive's)
Michael Keating – (Service Head, One Tower Hamlets)
Aman Dalvi – (Chief Executive)
Ann Sutcliffe – (Service Head BSF)
Sian Pipe – (Energy Manager)
Steve Murray – (Head of Arts and Events)
Paul Gresty – (Strategy Policy and Performance Officer)
Louise Russell – (Service Head, Strategy Policy and Performance)
Sarah Barr – (Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer)
Adam Walther – (Strategy Policy and Performance Officer)
– (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tim Archer and Canon Michael Ainsworth.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rachael Saunders declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 7 as she was a Councillor representative on the Richmix Board.

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 3rd April 2012 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

There were no requests.

5. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

There were no called-in reports.

6. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Scrutiny Spotlight

The Chair welcomed the Mayor, Lutfur Rahman, who was in attendance with Aman Dalvi, the Interim Chief Executive. Mayor Rahman gave a verbal presentation to the Committee.

He outlined the following key points:

1. The role of Overview and Scrutiny in a Mayoral System

- Acts as a critical friend and an important check and balance on the Executive;
- Ensures that the Mayor delivers his mandate for the residents of Tower Hamlets and adds value through scrutiny reviews.

2. Working more productively together

Prior to the start of this Committee meeting, the Mayor had a meeting with the Chair and it was agreed that he would build on his relationship with the OSC. To do this the following was agreed:

- I. The Mayor's office would see any call-in reports earlier to enable them to respond more effectively to OSC's recommendations.
- II. The OSC would receive updates from Cabinet on actions taken in response to call-in report recommendations ;
- III. The Mayor and senior officers would consider more proactive engagement with the OSC in respect of key decisions, discussing issues with the Committee earlier in the process.

The Mayor welcomed the apolitical and neutral role of the OSC as key to the success of the relationship with the Executive.

3. Progress on priorities

- Housing - 2010 affordable homes were delivered in 2011/12;
- ACA target was exceeded by 771 homes made decent in year 1;
- Blackwall Reach – planning permission was obtained from Thames Gateway and the GLA in March for the project to go ahead.

Jobs/Industry

- 1,541 Olympic jobs for residents;
- The London Living Wage had been expanded – at the December 2011 Cabinet meeting, 64 contracts were awarded with LLW;
- Graduate Scheme and Apprenticeships – 20 local graduates were in post with the Council and 28 new apprentices started today.

Education/Youth

- Two new Youth Centres opened – the London Metropolitan University Youth Venue and Osmani Youth Centre;
- Educational attainment had improved significantly – Tower Hamlets had the second most improved GCSE results in the country;
- £400,000 had been invested in 1:1 tuition;
- NEETs – current rate is 4.9%, improved from last year's figure of 5.3%.

Community Safety/Cohesion

- 17 new police officers had been agreed through the budget;
- Dealer-a-day - a total of 433 were arrested in the last financial year;
- Partnership approach to English Defence League - successfully banned from marching in the borough.

Environment

- Altab Ali Park re-opened on 27th March;
- Victoria Park fully re-opened on 5th May.

Health and Wellbeing

- Quit-smoking services were exceeding their targets;
- Free homecare saved despite the budget constraints;
- Health and Wellbeing Board developing our partnership strategy to reduce health inequality in the borough.

Arts, Heritage and Leisure

- Procurement underway for Poplar Baths;
- Cable Street Mural completed last October;
- Bethnal Green Memorial was given £100,000 and started in February.

New Initiatives

Looking to the next year:

- Mayor's Education Award- 711 young people paid and awaiting schools to confirm attendance;
- Aim higher - providing 4 new advisors to schools, introducing master-classes, increasing university visits, ambitious targets set to get young people into Universities;
- Energy Co-op - launching later this month;
- Olympics - ensuring that the Council maximised fun for residents and minimised disruption. The Mayor will be scrutinising the London Mayor's performance on the Olympic legacy to ensure that Tower Hamlets benefits from the legacy;
- Fairness Commission - developing remit and possible commissioners.

Where Overview and Scrutiny can add value next year:

- Post 16 education – with the rise of Academies and Free Schools, how can we bring our 'A' level results in line with GCSE results?
- Employment – more thinking is needed on how we can help residents back into employment;
- The NHS reforms – what does this mean for Tower Hamlets?

Members asked a number of questions and the following responses were provided:

- Members and co-optees expressed concern over the Mayor's reticence in accepting successful call-ins. The Mayor welcomed advice given and assured Members that he supported the call-in process and would like

to take on board criticisms and suggestions. However, in some cases there would be disagreement;

- Cllr Saunders raised the following points:
 - I. She referred to the missing poem at the renovated Altab Ali Park, and sought assurances that it could be reinstated. The Mayor endeavoured to look into the matter;
 - II. The Fairness Commission model at Islington was led by their Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cllr Saunders asked if this approach could be adopted. The Mayor had some reservations about the Islington model, but would look to see how elements of it might be incorporated into the Tower Hamlets model;
 - III. The NHS reforms presented a lot of challenges for the borough and opportunities for local democracy. Cllr Saunders would welcome dialogue on how the Health Scrutiny Panel and the Health and Well-being Board could influence the reforms in a positive way. The Mayor was of the view that the Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel had a role to perform and should be able to contribute and provide constructive criticism.
- Cllr Eaton expressed concern that vital information was not forthcoming from the Borough Commander and Members believed that the police should be important partners. With the new Borough Commander in post, she sought assurances that the Mayor would try to forge a more productive relationship. The Mayor assured Members that he viewed crime seriously and would therefore convey Members' views to the new Borough Commander. The Chair added that she would be inviting the Borough Commander to attend the OSC in the new municipal year to address Members' concerns;
- Cllr Islam requested an update on the proposal to have a multi-faith burial ground in the borough. The Mayor stated that his wish was to take this forward. Mr Dalvi added that most of the sites being considered were outside the borough as local options would be too expensive;
- Another Member requested an update on independent appointments to the Tower Hamlets Homes Board. The Mayor stated that Members were due to be appointed shortly. Mr Dalvi added that the deadline for appointing these posts was the end of May 2012 and it was anticipated that the new Board would be in place by mid-June;
- Cllr Snowdon asked about the welfare reforms and wished to know what steps the Mayor was taking to ameliorate their impact. The Mayor stated that a lot of work had taken place and expressed concern that the benefit cap would cause hardship to residents. A working group had been set up to address these issues;
- Cllr Eaton expressed reservations about planning permission being granted to Registered Social Landlords [RSLs] to register properties below the social rented targets. Targets set ought to be met and not

deviated from. Mr Dalvi stated the aim was to meet the target but, depending on the development, it could be difficult to achieve;

- Cllr Saunders sought assurances that as Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel she would be able to attend the Health and Wellbeing Board as an observer. The Mayor stated that he was awaiting guidance from the Department of Health. She also referred to education pass rates and the need for young people to obtain the top grades and wished to know what plans the Mayor had to help achieve this. The Mayor's ambition was to support and ensure that the local young people performed to the best of their abilities;
- One Member asked about support for residents without employment to help them get back into work. The Mayor agreed about the need for support and referred to help that was currently provided through Skillsmatch and other initiatives.

The Chair also raised the following points:

- She expressed concerns about the lack of middle ground employment opportunities, despite the plethora of financial and retail jobs. Mr Dalvi explained that market forces were the main determinant of this, however, as part of section 106 requirements, the Council was able to request that developers provide employment. The Council was also able to use its purchasing power to ensure that organisations forged links with schools and colleges to increase local employment opportunities;
- Following on from the earlier meeting with the Mayor, the Chair wished to clarify that call-ins would be submitted to the Mayor and officers, and, that Cabinet referred called-in reports back to the OSC with comments, even where the original decision was not overturned. This would help to improve the relationship between the OSC and the Cabinet;
- The Chair also spoke about the need to re-think what the guidelines ought to be for key decisions as these had caused some concern during the year. She also referred to the budget process and asked if the Mayor would attend the OSC meeting before the budget process and at the end of the year. The Mayor expressed gratitude to the Chair for the invitation, but stated that the Lead Member for Resources would play an active part in the OSC budgetary process;

The Chair thanked the Mayor and the Interim Chief Executive for their attendance.

RESOLVED

That the verbal presentation be noted.

6.2 Asset Management and Value for Money

Councillor Sirajul Islam, Scrutiny Lead Resources, and Adam Walther, Strategy Policy and Performance Officer, introduced the report.

The Chair welcomed the recommendation of the corporate landlord scheme and Members commended the report and highlighted a number of issues to which the following responses were given:

- There was no mention of York Hall with regards to the top ten consumer groups;
- Water reduction also needed prioritising;
- An update was requested on moveable assets;
- The Chair queried the high electricity costs incurred by the Council's estates. Ms Sian Pipe, Energy Manager, explained that electricity was more expensive than gas, and there were over 2,000 sites consuming electricity. However, there was a 0.2% reduction in this year's figures.

Ms Pipe further explained that York Hall was not on the list as it did not make the top ten. Ms Pipe recently had a meeting with Thames Water and she notified Members that water reduction was next on the agenda.

Ms Ann Sutcliffe, Service Head, Building Schools for the Future, added that all the secondary schools now had controlled and metered flushes in the bathrooms to reduce water use.

Councillor Islam explained that moveable assets had not been covered by the review.

The Chair thanked Councillor Islam and the officers for the report.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

6.3 Arts and Events Scrutiny Challenge Session

Councillor Zenith Rahman, Scrutiny Lead, Communities Localities and Culture, and Paul Gresty, Strategy Policy and Performance Officer presented the report.

The Chair acknowledged that arts and events had a large part to play in bringing different strands of the Tower Hamlets community together in an exciting and innovative way. One Member asked if it was possible to offer art therapy to help children, young people and families. Mr Gresty was not aware of such an initiative, but said he would pass this suggestion back to the arts and events team.

The Chair thanked the Councillor and officer for presenting the report.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Scrutiny Lead, Development and Renewal – Councillor Helal Uddin

Councillor Uddin said he and Cllr Saunders had met with Colin Cormack from the Housing Options Service to discuss housing issues for people with mental health problems in particular, and how we could ensure better housing provision for people with these issues. They discussed how the health assessments were made and reported to the service and found that doctors were not obliged to provide a breakdown of factors affecting a patient. They were also concerned about the ability of people with mental health problems to participate in the bidding process and whether this affected their prospects of obtaining suitable housing. Cllr Uddin said he would continue to look into this issue.

Scrutiny Lead, Children Schools and Families - Councillor Amy Whitelock

Councillor Whitelock discussed the review of children's centres which she had undertaken this year, addressing concerns in relation to the process, communication with members and parents and outcomes in terms of provision of different services. She said she would be submitting the final report to the OSC in June.

Scrutiny Lead, Adults Health and Wellbeing - Councillor Rachel Saunders

Councillor Saunders outlined the following points for the Committee:

- There had been one Health Scrutiny Panel [HSP] and a meeting with officers since the last OSC, which focused on service users, their views and their influence;
- There was a presentation by the Barts Health Trust at the last meeting and it was hoped that the HSP would continue to have a good dialogue with them;
- The relationship between the HSP and the Health and Wellbeing Board was in need of clarification.

One Member enquired if it was possible to benchmark with other boroughs to ascertain the right way forward with regards to Health scrutiny functions.

Councillor Saunders explained that as the Chair of the HSP, she was able to attend meetings of the HWB, albeit in a non-voting capacity. It was currently a shadow board, soon to be placed on a statutory footing from which point the relationship should become more formalised.

The Chair updated the Committee on the work she had carried out to date in relation to the referral from full Council about funding for the Rich Mix and Bancroft Library. She had met with Rich Mix and officers from CLC. She had found that Rich Mix had met their required targets and should therefore receive the monies. The problems stemmed from an oversight by the LDA, but the management of the centre was much improved.

RESOLVED

That the verbal presentations be noted.

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

8.1 Section 1 Pre-Decision Questions be Submitted to Cabinet on 9th May 2012

Nil items.

8.2 Mayoral Decisions

Nil items.

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

The Chair drew Members' attention to the tabled list of draft dates for the new municipal year.

In conclusion, the Chair noted:

- That it had been a successful year with regards to the budget;
- Additional work had been undertaken with TfL successfully;
- The OSC had made some inroads with regards to youth service provision;
- However, there had been poor reporting of key decisions and it was hoped that this would improve thereby improving the relationship with the Mayor;
- It was anticipated that the issues facing workers in third sector organisations would be looked at.

Ms Sarah Barr, Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer reminded Members that the Annual Report would be submitted to the next Committee in June.

Finally, the Chair thanked all the Members and officers for all their hard work throughout the municipal year.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

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