

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2007

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

Members Present:

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman (Chair)
Councillor Simon Rouse
Councillor Shahed Ali
Councillor Clair Hawkins
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique
Councillor Stephanie Eaton
Councillor Oliur Rahman
Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Tim Archer
Councillor Waiseul Islam
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Helal Abbas

Co-opted Members Present:

Mr H Mueenuddin – Muslim Community Representative

Guests Present:

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Officers Present:

Alex Cosgrave – Corporate Director, Environment and Culture
– Corporate Director, Children's Services
– Service Head, Corporate Finance
Claire Symonds – Head of Customer Access
Michael Keating – (Service Head, Research & Scrutiny)
Graham White – (Legal Adviser)
Sara Williams – (Assistant Chief Executive)
Alan Steward – (Policy Scrutiny Manager)
Angus Dixon – (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor A A Sardar, for whom Councillor Ahmed Adam Omer was deputising.

RESOLVED

That the apologies for absence be noted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **MOVED** and it was

RESOLVED

That the Section 1 Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 9th January, 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

No requests to submit petitions had been received.

5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS

At the request of the Chair, Mr Dixon, Committee Clerk, informed the meeting that one deputation request had been received from Archant London with respect to East End Life.

The Chair welcomed the deputation and asked them to address the meeting. Mr Starbrook and Mr Hooker, on behalf of the deputation, presented to the Committee their belief that the consultation undertaken by the Council in regard to East End Life had been inadequate and overly restrictive in terms of the timelines imposed upon them to provide information. They further presented options with regard to Archant London taking over the publishing of East End Life, and the benefits that they believed would accrue to Council through this.

Mr Starbrook and Mr Hooker responded to a series of questions put by members covering issues such as 'sexploitation', readership and race headlines.

The Chair thanked the deputation for their attendance.

6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

6.1 REPORT CALLED IN - East End Life Development Options

At the request of the Chair, Michael Keating, Head of Research and Scrutiny, presented the call-in procedure to the Committee.

Councillor Tim Archer for the Call-In Members outlined their main concerns, principally with regard to their belief that the report outlined far too few development options for East End Life. They considered that the options presented in the report did not allow Cabinet sufficient scope to consider concerns with the publication including that it was driving out competition, was overly political, and was being subsidised by tax payers to the equivalent of 1% of Council Tax.

Committee Members put detailed questions to the Deputy Leader, Councillor Sirajul Islam, who was substituting for the Lead Member, and Ms Sara Williams, Assistant Chief Executive, on a number of related issues including the lack of cross party material published, effective distribution of the paper around the Borough and the lack of up-to-date cost/benefit analysis.

Councillor Islam and Ms Williams responded on behalf of the Cabinet in detail on the points raised, stating that there were no barriers to cross party coverage in the paper, as stories were included on the basis of merit. They agreed that there were issues with ensuring the paper was evenly distributed throughout the Borough.

The Chair put forward his view that the paper needed to provide greater cross-party exposure as promoting Council services and activities was part of its role. The Chair stated that this could be included as part of the framework for East End Life decided by Cabinet.

MOVED by Councillor Simon Rouse and **SECONDED** by Councillor Stephanie Eaton:

“A fresh report should be tabled for full Cabinet consideration. This report should detail over and above the current report:

1. A full option set for East End Life including supporting financial impact. These options should include, but not be limited to:
 - Ceasing publication
 - Amending the format from a commercial format to simply a production of statutory and information notices, with no editorial content
 - Frequency options that should include monthly production, quarterly production in both commercial and non-commercial formats

2. An exit strategy outlining how the Council could exit East End Life with supporting timescales and financial impact.
3. The range of commercial rates that would be available to the Council should it choose to place its advertising with commercial papers. This should include rate card costs but also the likely bulk advertising negotiations that the Council believes it could obtain.
4. A more detailed consideration under section 5 of the Editorial Approach outlining how East End Life can be produced independent of Majority Group direction and ensuring balanced input from across all political groups. This should include how opposition Councillors views and opinions on Council services can be incorporated in reports.
5. The detailed budget and costs report for East End Life outlining current expenditure by accounts line. This should incorporate expenditure on temporary staff, consultants and contractors and all staff expenses, including entertainment costs.”

MOVED as an amendment by the Chair and **SECONDED** by Councillor Clair Hawkins that the motion be amended as follows:

“A fresh report should be tabled for full Cabinet consideration. This report should detail over and above the current report a more detailed consideration of how the East End Life framework can be changed to ensure that the publication reflects the activities of all Councillors and thereby ensures balanced input from across all political groups. This should include how opposition Councillors views and opinions on Council services can be incorporated in reports.”

The amendment was put to the meeting and was **LOST**.

The original motion was then put to the meeting. Four votes were recorded for the motion and four votes against the motion with one abstention. The Chair used his casting vote against the motion and the motion was therefore **LOST**.

Accordingly the Chair declared that Cabinet decision 10.12 ‘East End Life – Development Options’ (CAB120/067) would not be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

6.2 REPORT CALLED IN - Review of Parking Services' Fees and Charges

Councillor Waiseul Islam for the Call-In Members outlined the main concerns that they held with the review of Parking Services, including doubts as to the effectiveness of the price of parking as a means of controlling demand for parking and to whether any increases in parking revenue as a result of any changes will be redirected towards better public transport and environmental initiatives. There were also concerns over equality and anti-poverty implications arising from the review.

Committee Members put detailed questions to the Deputy Leader, Councillor Sirajul Islam and Ms Cosgrave, Corporate Director Environment and Culture, on a number of related issues including the wider issue of insufficient parking in the Borough, emissions-based parking charges, and the impacts of removing pensioners' entitlement to free scratchcards for parking.

Councillor Sirajul Islam and Ms Alex Cosgrave responded on behalf of the Cabinet on the points raised, referring to the tabled written response document and stating that the comments made on emissions-based charging will be considered in the consultation process.

The Committee felt that there were concerns about the report and decisions by Cabinet. In particular, Members felt that in bringing the review forward, there needed to be:

- Consideration of the impact on Over 60s of the removal of free access to parking scratchcards, in particular the potential isolation of elderly people due to reduced affordability for family and friends to visit.
- Greater understanding of the equality impacts that the increased charges will have on deprived families as most do not have the same degree of access to private 'off-street' parking compared to more affluent residents and also often face more restricted public transport options due to the location of their residences.
- Commitments to genuine and wide ranging consultation on the introduction of emissions-based permit charging with analysis undertaken with regard to the financial implications across the various socio-economic groups of the community (with a view to minimising the impact on deprived residents).

The Committee were of the opinion that the Cabinet decisions should be referred back for further consideration. Accordingly, the Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That Cabinet be requested to agree that the implementation of the new proposed parking services' fees and charges be delayed in order to give further consideration to their concerns and alternative options.

The Committee recommend that Cabinet:

1. Reinstate the free scratchcard provision for residents over 60.
2. Request an impact assessment on the proposed increases in parking charges for less affluent residents whose requirements cannot be adequately serviced by public transport (due to location, disability, family size etc) and therefore are dependant upon private car usage.
3. Seek assurances that consultation on the potential introduction of emissions based charging for parking is supported by analysis on equality

and anti-poverty implications considering that older and family sized cars will generally face higher emissions charges.

7. BUDGET & POLICY FRAMEWORK

7.1 General Fund Revenue Budget, Council Tax and Capital Programme 2007/8

The Lead Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Josh Peck, presented this item. Councillor Peck discussed some of the key limitations and factors within which the 2007/08 Budget had to be formulated. These limitations included the tightening financial situation that the Council faced due to Government efficiency targets, and the substantial increases in requirements for children's, and even more so adult, services.

The Committee discussed Cabinet's budget proposals. There was discussion about the use of consultants, efficiencies, the level of reserves, consultation over the budget and the interrelationship between housing allocation policies and the demand for care packages.

Members also wanted an early discussion next year on the role that Overview and Scrutiny Committee can play in ensuring the robustness of the budget.

Councillor Peck responded in detail on the points raised agreeing that it would be valuable to have the Committee involved at an earlier stage of the Budget process. Councillor Peck also agreed to send the Committee a written copy of his presentation notes.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the Committee endorse the comments of the Lead Member regarding the need for the earlier involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the budget setting process, and the Committee request that Cabinet consider this to further assist in ensuring the robustness of the budget.

7.2 Youth Justice Plan 2007/8

The Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Helal Abbas, presented this item. Councillor Abbas discussed that the Youth Justice Plan was a draft and welcomed suggestions from the Committee.

The Committee sought assurances that in circumstances when parenting intervention was being considered, that the situation was critically assessed to ensure that it was being properly targeted. Furthermore, it was essential that when young people were placed in secure accommodation, particularly outside of the borough, that this was of good quality. The Committee also wanted to see more indication in the plan of the challenges that services faced in improving youth justice and the lessons learnt from one year to the next.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the above comments be referred to Cabinet for information.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

8.1 Annual Review of Social Services Complaints Procedure 2005/06

Ms Claire Symonds, Head of Customer Access, presented the report on Social Services Complaints outlining that the Customer Access team are focussing on reducing the time taken to respond to complaints through increased liaison with other areas of the Council.

The Committee discussed with Ms Symonds benchmarking, integration of Social Care and Corporate Complaints reporting, and the non-reporting of complaints. The Committee thanked Ms Symonds for the level of detail provided within and the quality of the report, and expressed the importance of maintaining this standard in any amalgamation of the Social Care and Corporate Complaints reports.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

MOVED by the Chair, **SECONDED** by Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique and

RESOLVED that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 14.1.13 the meeting be extended under Rule 9 by 30 minutes.

9. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT

9.1 Verbal Updates from Scrutiny Leads

Scrutiny Leads reported on their areas of investigation across the breadth of their portfolios. All the Leads reported good progress and thanked the officers, panels, organisations etc with whom they worked.

The Chair thanked all the Scrutiny Leads for their updates.

RESOLVED

That the verbal updates provided by Scrutiny Leads be noted.

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

Four questions were tabled for consideration by Councillors Shahed Ali and Oliur Rahman regarding Cabinet 7th February, 2007 Agenda Item 7.1 'Housing Investment Strategy'.

The Committee discussed the questions and decided that subject to some minor wording changes that the questions should be put to Cabinet.

RESOLVED

That the questions as tabled be amended as per the Committee's discussion and then submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 10:10pm.