

Cabinet 5 November 2014	
Report of: Stephen Halsey, Head of Paid Service	Classification: Unrestricted
Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission: One year on	

Lead Member	Mayor Lutfur Rahman
Originating Officer(s)	Ellie Kuper Thomas, Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer (0363) / Louise Russell, Service Head for Corporate Strategy and Equality (3267)
Wards affected	All wards
Community Plan Theme	One Tower Hamlets
Key Decision?	Yes

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on the activity and impact of the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission; one year on from the publication of their report: "Tower Hamlets, Time to Act".

Attached is a report from the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commissioners (Appendix 2) outlining their reflections on the impact of the report.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

- Note this report, the monitoring grid in Appendix 1 and the Commissioner Report in Appendix 2.
- Agree the recommendation in section 3.5.1 that the research and themes collected and developed through the Fairness Commission are incorporated into the Community Plan refresh.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission was established in 2012 and published their report “Time to Act” in September 2013. In November the Fairness Commission held an Action Day for services and partners to develop actions in response to the recommendations. At the “Action Day” the Council agreed to produce a ‘one year on’ report in November 2014 which will provide an update on the progress made in delivering against the recommendations. This report provides the ‘one year on’ update and suggests that the research and themes collected and developed through the Fairness Commission are incorporated into the Community Plan refresh.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet could decide not to incorporate the research and themes collected and developed through the Fairness Commission into the Community Plan refresh. However this course of action is not recommended as this would mean losing the depth of understanding gathered through the Commission’s year long process of community engagement and would not maximise the benefit of the Fairness Commission for the Council or local community.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

4. BACKGROUND

4.1. The Fairness Commission Process:

The Mayor launched the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission in November 2012. The Commission was established to address issues of inequality and fairness within an environment of diminishing public sector resources, and make recommendations on how the Council and local partners could work together to continue to reduce inequality.

The Commission, made up of a Chair and thirteen independent commissioners from a range of backgrounds, including community and religious organisations, policy research, business and education institutions. Their work was supported by the Corporate Strategy, Policy and Performance Team in the Council and informed by research undertaken by the Corporate Strategy and Equality Team in the Council and researchers at Toynbee Hall.

During their yearlong programme of engagement and development, the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission held three formal day long public meetings, considering issues and ideas in relation to housing, poverty income and business, and safety nets for vulnerable people. They also undertook a range of resident engagement activities, visits to partner organisations and meetings with policy experts.

4.2. The Report:

The Fairness Commission published their report “Tower Hamlets – Time to Act” at the end of September 2013. The report made 16 recommendations relating to three key themes; money and financial inclusion, employment and housing. These recommendations were addressed to four audiences: national government; the council and local public sector; businesses and; the voluntary and community sector.

The report is available on the Council’s website at www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/fairness

4.3. Actions in response to the recommendations:

The Commission’s report was focused on prompting actions from the Council and other partners in the borough. Between October 2013 and April 2014, the Council worked with partners across the borough to develop a series of actions in response to the report.

4.3.1. The Launch:

At the report launch event, key partners responded to the Commission’s call to action by endorsing the report and committing to taking key elements forward:

- The Mayor welcomed the Commission’s recommendations around housing, employment and childcare.
- Barclays Bank, agreed to work with partners to increase the number of aspirational work experience places for young people in the borough, to support the growth of the Credit Union, and to investigate models of investment in affordable housing.
- London Councils endorsed the report’s recommendations, especially on employment services and committed to supporting the Council in further developing these recommendations into action.
- Citizens UK and the Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services endorsed the report’s recommendations. Citizens UK indicated that key areas of focus for Tower Hamlets London Citizens would be in areas identified in the Commission’s report, including improving affordable rent and standards in the private sector, as well as endorsing the further take up of London Living Wage.

4.3.2. The Fairness Commission Action Day:

Following the report launch, the Commissioners hosted an ‘action day’ in November 2013 designed to turn the recommendations into actions. The event, held at Toynbee Hall, involved over 80 participants including Cabinet members, officers from the council and its partners, representatives from the London Assembly, London Councils, think tanks, community and voluntary sector organisations and business.

Following the action day, the ideas and actions generated were further worked up by the Corporate Strategy and Equality Service working closely with senior managers from the Council, including the Corporate Management Team, and with other organisations who had agreed to lead on key actions. These organisations include the GLA's Housing Committee; the Church of England; the Financially Inclusive Tower Hamlets Network; Barclays; the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum; the London Community Credit Union; the Unite Union and the Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive.

At the Action Day the Council agreed to produce a 'one year on' report in November 2014 which will provide an update on the progress made in delivering against the recommendations. A group of commissioners also agreed to continue to support the delivery of the recommendations.

4.3.3. Cabinet Report:

In April 2014, following the commitments made at the launch and developed through the action day. Tower Hamlets Cabinet agreed the "Response to the recommendations of the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission" which outlined 39 specific actions the Council and partners agreed to undertake in response to the recommendations in the report.

A copy of the Cabinet report is available on the Council's website at <http://moderngov.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s55578/10.1%20Fairness%20Commission%20Cabinet%20Report.pdf>

4.3.4. The 2014 Mayoral Election:

During the local Mayoral Election Campaign the key themes and recommendations of the Fairness Commission helped to inform the policy debates and discussions. Some of the recommendations were reflected in manifestos and at the biggest election hustings, hosted by London Citizens, the candidates were asked to respond to a series of community requests, some of which reflected the Fairness Commission recommendations.

Lutfur Rahman was re-elected as Mayor of Tower Hamlets on the 22nd of May. The manifesto on which he was elected contained an agreement to progress some of the key recommendations of the Fairness Commission. These include the commitment to the create a Landlord Registration Scheme, an Integrated Employment Service and Hub, a Healthy High Streets Policy, Provide specialist support to residents affected by Welfare Reform and to support the development a London Living Rent Scheme.

4.4. Outcomes and Impact:

In the following months, the Council and partners have made significant progress in delivering the actions outlined in the report. Notable progress has been made in delivering several of the recommendations, including:

- Recommendation 2: “Tower Hamlets becomes an online borough” , towards which the Council and Partners are delivering events for UK Go Online week for the first time, alongside the creation of a Partnership Strategy and Action Plan.
- Recommendation 8: “Reimagine local employment services so they work better for local people and businesses”, towards which the Council has reached agreement with Job Centre Plus on a Memorandum of Understanding and is developing a shared system for supporting residents into employment and monitoring their progress.
- Recommendation 16: “That the standard of private rented accommodation is improved, and tenants better protected, through a landlord licensing scheme for Tower Hamlets”, towards which Cabinet agreed in September to develop the evidence base required to implement the scheme.

Council officers and partners have been aided by the continued support of the Commissioners, who have met twice to consider progress, ensure the actions meet the expectation of the recommendations and to use their networks and links to help delivery beyond the Council.

Appendix 1 provides a full update on the progress made towards meeting the each of the actions outlined in the April Cabinet Report.

The Commissioners have also drafted a ‘one year on report’, in which they report back on the progress they have seen, on both a national and local level, to address the concerns and recommendations in the report; as well as to press for further action in some areas. This is attached as Appendix 2.

4.4.1. Equalities monitoring:

The recommendations of the Fairness Commission cover a broad range of actions, many of which were focused on medium and long term improvements for residents in the borough. Therefore developing a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the equalities impact of the report and resulting actions is not practical. However many of the resulting actions, including the landlord registration scheme, the Healthy High Streets Policy, and the Digital Inclusion Strategy, will require equality impact assessments at the decision making stage. This will provide residents and stakeholders the ability to monitor how these actions will impact particular groups. In addition many of the actions prompted by the report will undertake ongoing monitoring of their uptake by equalities group, including the energy co-op; the work experience placements and the integrated employment service.

Finally, through the strategic plan and strategic measures set, many of which are also measured across equalities characteristics, we will be able to build a picture of the impact the report has had in the borough.

4.5. Where Next?

The Fairness Commission was always designed to be a time limited process and with the delivery of the 'one year on report', the role of the Fairness Commission has reached its natural conclusion. However the information, research and understanding gathered through the process, as well as the themes and ambition formulated by the Commission still has an ongoing role to play in the Council.

4.5.1. The Strategic Plan and Community Plan:

The actions agreed in the April Cabinet Report have already been embedded into the Council's annual Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan, together with the progress made in meeting the Mayor's Manifesto are monitored on a quarterly basis, ensuring that residents and stakeholders can continue to see the progress made towards the Commission's recommendations.

It is suggested that the Community Plan Refresh, currently being undertaken, should use the learning and research developed through the commission and that some of the themes of the commission – around fairness; creating new partnerships; and harnessing growth for the benefit of all, can inform the emerging Community Plan Themes.

4.5.2. Ongoing projects:

The April Cabinet paper formed the Council and Partners' formal response to the Fairness Commission's report and outlined the key actions it would undertake. However since the report was agreed, there have been several projects which have emerged which support the aims and recommendations of the Fairness Commission's report. These include the creation of a Community Interest Company to provide cheaper energy to residents through installing solar panels; the new employment support to be provided to residents impacted by welfare reform and the development of a council run Child-minding Agency.

In addition, the April Cabinet paper committed to building better relationships with businesses and their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and programmes, in order to respond the Commission's recommendation to widen and reshape the partnerships in the borough. The report committed the Council to producing a comprehensive needs assessment of the borough and mapping current CSR activity against need. The mapping is currently being undertaken and the needs assessment will work with the Business Charter and the work around promoting apprenticeships to form a new platform of engagement with local businesses.

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

5.1. There are no financial commitments arising from the recommendations within this report.

6. LEGAL COMMENTS

6.1. It is proposed that the themes collected and developed by the Fairness Commission be incorporated in the Council's Community Plan, which contains the Council's sustainable community strategy within the meaning of section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000. The purpose of such a strategy is to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Tower Hamlets and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom. The themes developed by the Fairness Commission would appear to be capable of incorporation into this plan.

6.2. The Deregulation Bill, which is being considered by Parliament, proposes to remove the obligation on local authorities to prepare sustainable community strategies. It will do that by deleting section 4 from the Local Government Act 2000. The deletion of the obligation will not have the effect that the Council is prevented from having a strategy for the purposes previously served by a sustainable community strategy, but it will make such a strategy discretionary. There may be good reasons, having regard to the Council's statutory functions, why the Council may choose to continue to have a Community Plan which sets the overall objectives for the Tower Hamlets Partnership.

6.3. The Council is subject to the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010, which requires it to have due regard to the following matters in the exercise of its functions: (1) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act; (2) the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (RPC) and those who don't; and (3) the need to foster good relations between persons who share an RPC and those who don't. The Council should consider these matters in the development of the Community Plan and some form of equality analysis should be carried out to support such consideration. The work of the Fairness Commission may inform that analysis.

7. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

7.1. The Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission was charged with examining the potential impact of public sector austerity on inequality in the borough and assess how best the Council and its local partners can marshal resources to prevent existing inequality from being exacerbated. This report provides an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Fairness Commission and highlights that much positive progress has been

made on actions which are designed to reduce inequality. In addition the report recommends that the research and themes developed through the Fairness Commission are fed into the Community Plan refresh which will continue

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

8.1. This report provides an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Fairness Commission. Some of the recommendations have positive environmental impacts, especially action 1.3 (Appendix 1) which will provide energy efficiency advice to vulnerable residents and explore the possibility of installing photovoltaic panels on roofs through a third party funding scheme.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1. This report provides an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Fairness Commission and mitigates the risk that the recommendations would not be implemented. In addition each of the individual actions in Appendix 1 have been or will be subject to their own decision which will highlight any risks and mitigation.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1. This report has no implications for crime reduction.

11. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

11.1. This report recommends that the research and themes collected and developed through the Fairness Commission are incorporated into the Community Plan refresh, thereby ensuring that the impact of the research and learning is ongoing, ensuring efficiency.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- Response to the Recommendations of the Fairness Commission, Cabinet April 2014
<http://moderngov.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s55578/10.1%20Fairness%20Commission%20Cabinet%20Report.pdf>

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Monitoring grid
- Appendix 2: Commissioner Report

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

- N/A