

<b>Committee:</b> <b>Overview and Scrutiny</b>	<b>Date:</b> <b>4<sup>th</sup> March 2008</b>	<b>Classification:</b> <b>Unrestricted</b>	<b>Report No.</b>	<b>Agenda Item No.</b>
<b>Report of:</b> <b>Assistant Chief Executive</b> <b>Originating Officer(s):</b> <b>Jebin Syeda</b> <b>Scrutiny Policy Officer</b>		<b>Title:</b> <b>Scrutiny Challenge Session – Revisiting the Youth Services Plan Scrutiny review</b>  <b>Ward(s) affected: All</b>		

**1. Summary**

- 1.1** This report updates the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the scrutiny challenge session held on 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2007 where the Youth Services Plan scrutiny review (undertaken in 2005) was revisited.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1** Overview and Scrutiny is asked to note the outcomes of the scrutiny challenge session and consider the recommendations put forward in this paper.

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Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) Section 100D

**LIST OF “BACKGROUND PAPERS” USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

Background paper

Scrutiny Review of Youth Services

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

**Jebin Syeda**  
**020 7364 0941**

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the Scrutiny Challenge Session which considered the effectiveness of London Borough of Tower Hamlets Youth Service Plan scrutiny review.
- 2.2 The session was attended by a group of 6 Members led by the Scrutiny Lead for Learning Achievement and Leisure. In addition to the members, Co-optee Hasan Mueenuddin attended, he was also involved in the original scrutiny review. The Lead Member for the challenge session invited one of the contracted youth service providers to attend and they were able to make useful contributions.

## **3. Purpose**

- 3.1 Challenge sessions are designed as a quick way for a group of members to get to grips with key policy issues and ensure a robust check on the Council's policies. The purpose of these sessions are for members to consider the effectiveness of a scrutiny review by looking at progress made against the recommendations. The challenge session also aimed to reflect on the review and consider what worked well for the review. The purpose of the scrutiny challenge session was to:

- Assess how well the review on Youth Service worked and what specific aspects worked.
- Enable members to be informed of work developed by Youth Services following the review

- 3.2 At the end of the challenge session it was expected that there would be:

- Increased member understanding and awareness of Youth Service Plan and service provision;
- Member awareness and input in monitoring of progress against the recommendations from a previous scrutiny review;
- Reflection and evaluation of a previous review and capturing key lessons around what works and what can be done better on reviews;
- Member led recommendations for service improvements.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 Tower Hamlets is ethnically diverse and has a rich cultural heritage, this sits cheek by jowl with the borough featuring some of the most economically disadvantaged parts of the country with high levels of unemployment. The young people of the borough are no exception to this. Young people make up a significantly high percentage of the population with a high number aged between 13 and 19 living in one of the most densely populated part of Britain. The Youth Service has a challenging role to play in ensuring equality of access to high quality services and to play its role in fostering community cohesion.
- 4.2 During May 2005, a scrutiny review was undertaken and an OFSTED inspection at the time graded the service as 'adequate'. There were some local concerns about youth service provision and a decision was made to undertake a review of the Youth Service Plan to be headed by the Lead for Learning, Achievement and Leisure. This review

was to produce a number of service improvement recommendations as part of its findings.

4.3 The Challenge Session was an opportunity for members and staff involved in the review to reflect on and evaluate how the review has worked, looking in particular at what has worked well as points for consideration in improving the scrutiny process. The Session enabled members to challenge the service on the progress it has made against the recommendations from the review as a way of evaluating the impact the review has made, focusing on outcomes.

4.4 For effective scrutiny purposes, there is an increased expectation for Members to reflect on reviews undertaken and to consider the impact of these reviews. In addition to this, one of the recommendations of the review was for increased member involvement in monitoring outcomes of the review on Youth Service Plan.

## **5. Policy Context**

5.1 The vision within the Tower Hamlets Children and Young People's Strategic Plan sets out the following:

'The children and young people of Tower Hamlets should get off to a flying start and should continue to learn in a safe, healthy and stimulating environment. These foundations will give them the grounding they need for a happy, prosperous life so that they can shape their own futures and become creative responsible adults.'

5.2 The service delivers this vision with provisions of a range of informal education opportunities for young people aged between 11-25 years, it has a particular emphasis on 13- 19 year olds in Tower Hamlets.

5.3 The service is subject to Ofsted inspection and the next Joint Area Review is due in March 2008. The service is monitored through a number of Best Value indicators, these being:

- Reach – number of young people who register and use the facilities once
- Participation - the number of young people who attend 5 or more sessions
- Recorded Outcomes – number of young people who develop set skills contributing to national outcomes
- Accredited outcomes – attainment of national certificates

## **6. Youth Service Plan Scrutiny Review**

6.1 The scrutiny review took place during 2005 on the Council's Youth Service Plan, led by a cross-party Working Group of Councillors and Co-opted Members. The review also involved the youth service contracted providers. At the time, the Working Group visited some of the facilities and spoke to young people as service users and youth workers delivering the service.

6.2 Given the context in Tower Hamlets- a borough which has the highest proportion of young people in the country and many families living in economically disadvantaged circumstances, the need for quality youth service provision is key. The importance of youth service provision given this context is recognised in the review.

6.3 The Working Group made a number of recommendations to improve accommodation (5), partnership working with contracted service providers (4) and the Third Sector (4). Recommendations were also made around Member engagement (4)

## **7. Effective scrutiny reviews – what works?**

7.1 Overview and Scrutiny tracks progress against review recommendations every 6 months. This is to embed the scrutiny process and ensure that the recommendations for service improvements can demonstrate progress; and is reported to the Overview and Scrutiny committee. It is one way of demonstrating the effectiveness of scrutiny. The reflections and discussions on the effectiveness of the scrutiny process on this particular review from the Working Group point of view concluded with the following areas for consideration as what worked well. It is suggested that these points are noted as forms of good practice in scrutiny and be considered for improving the scrutiny process.

7.2 What worked well:

- Preparing well and having agreed clear expectations
- Engaging all stakeholders
- Meetings that take place at local venues
- Members are interested and are pro-active
- Members receiving detailed information packs
- Members meeting service providers, stakeholders/service users and key council officers
- Members visiting facilities to inform knowledge and understanding through the users perspective
- Having the right level of challenge and support
- Good working relationship with those involved with active contributions from all
- Officers under scrutiny being helpful and open about areas for improvement.

## **8 Key discussion points and recommendations**

8.1 Members were presented with policy and background information on youth services and illustrated outcomes against some key recommendations from the scrutiny review. Members found the information to be very useful, and there was acknowledgment that good progress had been made in some of the areas. However, Members raised a number of additional issues from their direct experience as Councillors, demonstrating the changing nature of youth service provision and the challenges it brings.

## **9 Recommendations**

9.1 Following the session, the Members who attended the challenge session identified areas for further action and the following recommendations are made:

9.2 The need for further information emerged from the discussions that took place and in light of the forthcoming Joint Area Review and Members desire to be further informed, the service offered to hold a Members seminar where the information listed below could be disseminated. Members would like LAP directors and contractors to be in attendance at the seminar. Although the challenge session served its purpose, members felt the following information would be useful:

- Funding levered in by contractors
- Contracting and monitoring arrangements
- Performance information and comparative data across the LAP areas

- Accessibility for disabled people and what is being done to encourage participation
- Future developments of youth provision and accommodation across LAP areas
- Provisions made for girls

**R1 That a Members seminar be organised to inform Members about the JAR, giving consideration to information request made in 9.2.**

9.3 A discussion took place about quality and investment in youth provision, where some concerns were raised about this and the monitoring undertaken against the value of contracts. In light of the information provided on the different levels of funding to different contractors, Members were keen to meet with service providers and users, to raise their understanding and knowledge.

**R2 That Members be given an opportunity to visit contractor facilities.**

9.4 Members would like to see further involvement of the voluntary sector on issues around detached youth service provision to ensure that the provision is informed by local knowledge. In particular Members felt that mother tongue groups would have good knowledge and contact with the local community to inform the service on reaching out to specific communities.

**R3 That the Service should involve and consult local voluntary groups including mother tongue groups on issues around detached youth service provision.**

9.5 Members raised concerns about access to youth service by disabled young people. Some concerns were raised about barriers faced by this group and Members felt that an audit of facilities and information on service take-up by this group would assure Members and the wider community that the provisions in the contracts were meeting the needs of disabled young people.

**R4 That the Service explores ways an audit can be undertaken of disabled users of youth service and how these services are publicised to the public and Members.**

9.6 Members recognised that work that had gone in to engage the Somali community but want to ensure that provisions are going to be made to ensure that the Chinese community and any new emerging communities are actively engaged and access youth services.

**R5 That the Service continues working to put in place a mechanism to engage the Chinese and any new emerging communities**

9.7 A discussion took place about appropriate provisions for those who practice faith; it was felt that more could be done to give consideration to religious and cultural needs to ensure that those who practice their faith can have access to mainstream youth service provision/facilities. Some concerns were raised that provisions need to be made for young women and that this required understanding of religious and cultural needs.

**R6 That in consultation with the Inter-Faith Forum, service users and staff, the Service explores how religious needs could be incorporated in youth service curriculum.**

9.8 Members were keen that the service maximised opportunities for securing youth service provision, it is felt that the stock transfer process is a missed opportunity to secure youth provision to date. The members asked for a proactive approach in identifying need for new facilities/provisions and advising developers and planners to include such provisions/facilities within the developing and planning structures and the stock transfer process.

**R7 That the Council and the youth service maximises opportunities during stock-transfer and master planning process to secure adequate youth provision.**

9.9 Members recognise the important role that youth service plays in the life of the young people of Tower Hamlets. The review was undertaken in 2005, there have been some rapid changes and Members were keen to be continuously involved in the improvement and development of the service.

**R8 That Members be involved in the development of the ‘Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities’ in Tower Hamlets.**

**10 Conclusion**

10.1 Members felt that the review was effective in scrutinising the Youth Service Plan and coming up with recommendations which were effective and pushed for change. They acknowledge that the service took well to implementing the recommendations and recognise the work that has been put into making good progress. Given the changing nature of youth services, Members have put forward a number of recommendations which would add to the current positive achievements.

**11. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)**

11.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report

**12. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer**

12.1 Any financial implications directly arising from this report will be met from within existing resources.

**13. Equal Opportunity Implications**

13.1 Issues were raised in the session around provision for disabled people, young women and faith based youth service provision. The information provided to Members at the seminar and the implementation of recommendations 4 and 5 would address some of the concerns raised.

**14. Anti-Poverty Implications**

14.1 Tower Hamlets is a very diverse community and has a very young population. Given the strengths and the challenges of this, and the changing nature of youth services, we must continue to provide an accessible service for all members of the community.

**15. Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment**

15.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

## **16. Risk Management**

16.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.