

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 4 MARCH 2008**

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

**Members Present:**

Councillor Marc Francis (Chair)  
Councillor Shahed Ali  
Councillor Alibor Choudhury  
Councillor Stephanie Eaton  
Councillor Alexander Heslop (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Ahmed Hussain  
Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique  
Councillor Salim Ullah

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Clair Hawkins – (Lead Member, Children's Services)  
Councillor Denise Jones – (Leader of the Council)

**Co-opted Members Present:**

Mr Azad Ali – Parent Governor Representative  
Terry Bennett – Church of England Representative  
Mr H Mueenuddin – Muslim Community Representative

**Officers Present:**

Suki Binjal – (Interim Head of Non-Contentious Team, Legal Services)  
Afazul Hoque – (Acting Scrutiny Policy Manager, Scrutiny and Equalities, Chief Executive's)  
Michael Keating – (Acting Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive's)  
Shanara Matin – (Scrutiny Policy Officer)  
Martin Smith – (Chief Executive)  
Kweku Quagraine – (Democratic Services)  
John Williams – (Service Head, Democratic Services)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received from Committee members.

The Committee noted that Councillor Ahmed Hussain was now the Conservative Group representative on the Committee and that Councillor Oliur Rahman had been appointed to replace Councillor Hussain as the Respect – The Unity Coalition Group representative.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were made.

**3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique and Councillor Salim Ullah requested that particular questions they asked during the previous meeting's Lead Member Scrutiny Spotlight be included in the minutes. The Chair requested that they liaise with the minute taker to provide details of the relevant items.

**RESOLVED**

That subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2008 be confirmed as a true and accurate record.

**4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS**

No petitions were received.

**5. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATIONS**

No deputations were received.

**6. SECTION ONE REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

There were no Section One Reports called in from the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

**7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chair, Councillor Marc Francis, welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor Denise Jones, to the meeting.

Councillor Jones gave a brief presentation on the key achievements and challenges facing the borough, the Council and Tower Hamlets Partnership currently. She also gave an outline of her role as Leader, her assessment of the Council's improved performance in a number of areas and the operation of the authority's decision-making and scrutiny processes. Councillor Jones particularly highlighted the Council's commitment to continuous improvement in services, and successful outcomes in relation to Crossrail and the 2012 Olympics.

Members of the Committee put a wide range of questions to Councillor Jones to which she responded as set out below.

Councillor Ahmed Hussain asked about the Leader's assessment of overview and scrutiny; about Post Office closures; and about the Council's development policies in relation to the religious needs of residents.

Councillor Jones felt that overview and scrutiny made a valuable contribution to the work of the authority, both through detailed reviews and comments on items referred to and from Cabinet. In relation to Post Office closures, she felt it was important to maintain a cross party campaign. Councillor Jones agreed that development plans needed to address the full range of residents' needs as far as was lawfully possible.

Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique sought further information on housing and the waiting list; the cleanliness of the borough particularly away from the Docklands area; and youth provision.

Councillor Jones stated that Tower Hamlets was a leader in the provision of affordable homes. There were approximately 20,000 people on the housing waiting list but the Council was working with RSLs to provide additional housing as well as setting up an ALMO to attract additional funding to improve existing homes. There was a need for a range of approaches to secure more large family homes required by many local people. In relation to cleanliness of the borough there was further work to be done but additional money was included in the current budget for this purpose. Regarding youth services, Councillor Jones felt that further work was required to ensure the service was fit for purpose and the provision attractive to all young people.

Councillor Shahed Ali asked whether "affordable" housing was in fact affordable for local people. He also asked whether the Leader would agree to additional consultation on the proposed ALMO, for example via Council Tax bills or East End Life.

Councillor Jones referred to housing benefit and shared ownership provisions which could help local people but agreed that unemployment and low incomes were matters of concern that could prevent many people from buying properties. In relation to the ALMO, a great deal of consultation had already been done and the Leader pointed out that under the ALMO proposal the Council would retain both the freehold of the properties and the policy making role, with the ALMO merely delivering services on its behalf.

Councillor Shahed Ali raised further questions on whether the Cabinet gave full consideration to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations; and on whether there was a contradiction between the Council's Environmental Policy to cut fuel emissions and its use of diesel vehicles in its own fleet.

The Leader confirmed that in most cases the recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny were very helpful to the Cabinet. They were always given full consideration although of course on occasion the two bodies did not agree and it was the Cabinet's responsibility to make a decision. In relation to diesel vehicles, the fleet vehicles had been adjusted to improve emission levels. The Cabinet had agreed an environmental strategy last year.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury asked about the successes, challenges and lessons learnt from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund work; the Council's plans for further work on preventing extremism and an Action Plan in response to the Government's Commission on Integration and Cohesion; and progress on implementing the Auditor's recommendations in respect of grant claims.

Councillor Jones referred to some of the successes of the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. She pointed out that Tower Hamlets was the first borough to role out Safer Neighbourhood Teams. In relation to the new Working Neighbourhoods Funding, work was underway within the Partnership and in liaison with the voluntary sector. The Fund was focused on employment initiatives but it was possible for a range of work to be covered under this heading. In relation to preventing extremism, the Council had been successful in obtaining grant funding for a programme of initiatives. Work was continuing with the Police in this area which was also reflected in the new Community Plan priorities.

The Chief Executive referred to the issue of grant claims, and was confident that the forthcoming 2007 Audit letter would record an increase in quality in this area.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury further referred to the Ocean Regeneration Trust consultation, which he considered had not been conducted in the best way. He asked for an assurance that the maximum amount of social housing would be included in the proposed development and that as far as possible the process would be led by the local community.

Councillor Jones confirmed that the Council's target for affordable housing would apply to the development. Three Panels were in place to lead the project and local residents would play a key role.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton enquired whether the Leader would favour opening up the Tower Hamlets Partnership structures, for example PMG and CPAGs, to greater Member scrutiny. The Leader stated that the Partnership was not a closed structure and there was some misunderstanding on how the

PMG worked – it was a group composed of representatives from residents, the Council and partner agencies and its members were listed on the website. The Partnership structure was currently under review and issues around scrutiny and representation had been discussed at a recent awayday.

Councillor Eaton also enquired as to the ways in which the Council could influence partner organisations to improve services for the benefit of local people. Councillor Jones confirmed that this was done via the targets in the Community Plan and overseen by the CPAGs. The Chief Executive pointed out that under the new LAA regime, there would be a statutory responsibility in this regard.

Councillor Alex Heslop raised the possibility of a Town Centre Manager for Bow. He also sought more information on the PCT's recent decision to contract with Atos Health Care to provide GP services at St. Paul's Way, the consultation that had been undertaken and the review mechanisms built into the contract.

Councillor Jones noted the suggestion regarding a Town Centre Manager for Bow. She also referred to the role of the LAP Area Directors. In relation to St. Paul's Way, Councillor Jones was a non-executive Board member of the PCT. The Board had not let the contract but had authorised discussions with three bidders and officers had then concluded the contract in accordance with the agreed process. Councillor Jones pointed out that most GPs were in fact already small businesses. The new arrangements would provide a better service and longer opening hours than previously and this was the criterion on which service delivery decisions should be based.

Councillor Marc Francis referred to the recent Cabinet decision and call-in on the supermarket development at Gladstone Place. He asked whether the Leader felt the Cabinet's decision had undermined the Council's ability to secure a development that met local needs; and whether it was appropriate for the decision to be taken in advance of the public meeting. The Leader did not agree with Councillor Francis' analysis and pointed out that the Council was the freeholder but not the leaseholder of the site. Councillor Jones considered that the Cabinet decision was the best way of achieving the supermarket required in the Roman Road area.

The Chair thanked Councillor Jones for her attendance at the meeting and for answering the questions posed by Members.

## **8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

There were no items to consider under this heading.

## **9. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

### **9.1 Youth Justice Plan**

Councillor Clair Hawkins introduced the Youth Justice Plan report to the Committee. She highlighted the main elements of the report and key achievements including the award of a Level Four for performance by Tower Hamlets YOT, up from Level Three previously. Councillor Hawkins further explained that the Youth Justice Plan was based around 15 performance areas and 21 Key Performance Indicators against which the Youth Offending Service is assessed. She added that in developing the plan it was sought to focus on early intervention and prevention work and targeted work with at risk parents and families.

There was one correction to the figures in the report – First Time Entrants were up by 2.4% and not 7.7% as shown. This compared favourably to 4.3% for the ‘family’ boroughs but further work was still required.

The Committee raised a range of questions and comments in relation to the draft Youth Justice Plan, in particular:

- Members sought assurances around quality of secure accommodation for young people particularly those held outside of the borough.
- In future plans, the Committee would want to see more on the challenges that services faced in improving youth justice, specifically on how lessons learnt from one year are applied the next year.
- Members discussed sentencing trends, particularly the greater likelihood of custodial sentences at some times, and welcomed LBTH’s engagement with the Courts and Police on this point.
- The Committee raised questions about the measures in place to tackle the significant over-representation of black and mixed-race boys from Tower Hamlets in the criminal justice system.
- There were questions about the provisions available to work with offenders who are from newly arrived communities from Eastern Europe and those just over school-age.
- The Committee welcomed the changes to youth justice targets which will help to simplify the KPI on restorative justice and questioned whether this should be more challenging in future years.
- The committee strongly endorsed the idea of a Commission on Public Safety for Young People, and sought further clarity about the arrangements for ensuring its composition and remit and the timeframe it will work towards.

- Members felt that more work was needed around diversionary activities at the early stages of young people at the brink of becoming involved in the youth justice system; and were keen to see that good practice is being identified and promoted in the Plan.
- The focus on engaging third sector organisations was welcomed. However, Members would like to see details of those organisations in future reports. The committee also specifically asked for assurances that these will include mother tongue and religious facilities who work with children outside of school hours.
- Members were keen that issues around radicalisation should be explored in further detail within the Youth Justice Plan.
- The Committee recognised the importance of breaking the cycle of young people from families where there is a history of offending being more likely to become offenders themselves.
- Members were pleased to hear about the role the FISP is already playing in working with chaotic families and strongly support LBTH's proposed bid to the DCSF's Family Pathfinders scheme to expand its work to include the families of offenders.

The Committee noted the increase over the past four years in the number of young people receiving a conviction, or admitting guilt and receiving a reprimand or final warning. This was against a backdrop of a growing population of young people and an increase in detection rates for some crimes in the Borough.

Nevertheless, it does demonstrate a need for a strong partnership between the Council, police and other agencies to reduce offending in the first place and also draw young people out of the cycle of repeat offending before they become involved in the most serious offences.

Overall and subject to the above comments, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed the Youth Justice Plan and looked forward to the contribution it would make to public safety and reducing youth offending in Tower Hamlets.

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the draft Youth Justice Plan 2008/09 be endorsed and that the Cabinet and Council be recommended to agree its adoption.
- (2) That in considering the draft Plan, the Cabinet be advised of the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out above.

## **10. SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT**

### **10.1 Use of Consultants Scrutiny Review Report**

Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique introduced the report to the committee; he additionally took the opportunity to thank all the Council officers who contributed to compiling the document.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton explained that she saw the document and recommendations as positive and indicative, welcoming the detail of the report.

Councillor Marc Francis stated that he was pleased to see recommendation four (That targets for reducing expenditure on consultants should be highlighted as an objective in the Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan) being brought forward. He was less supportive of recommendation six (That directorates should increasingly use internal secondments and graduate trainees for one-off projects) but overall he welcomed the report and would await the Cabinet's response with interest.

### **RESOLVED**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Endorse the draft report.
2. Authorise the Service Head, Scrutiny and Equalities to agree the final report before its submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for Excellent Public Services.

### **10.2 Revisiting Youth Services Scrutiny Review Challenge Session**

Councillor Ahmed Hussain introduced the report, commending the work of officers who contributed in compiling the document.

Councillor Alex Heslop requested further information on the proposed Recommendation 6 ('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'). Councillor Hussain explained that members at the challenge session had been concerned that service providers should consult and be aware of the faith requirements of potential users and these should be taken into account to ensure that the way services were delivered did not act as a barrier to participation.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury and Mr Mueenuddin each agreed with Councillor Hussain's statement and felt that this recommendation was a useful contribution.



## **RESOLVED**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the outcomes of the scrutiny challenge session and endorse the recommendations put forward in the paper.

### **10.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Tracking Report**

Michael Keating introduced the report to the Committee, highlighting the key point that in the vast majority of cases the recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny had been accepted and progressed.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton expressed concern that a number of items were shown as 'Amber', and stressed the importance of monitoring these issues. The Chair stated that in these cases the recommendations had not yet been fully implemented.

## **RESOLVED**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress in implementing its recommendations.

## **11. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

Scrutiny Lead members reported on progress within their respective Scrutiny areas:

Councillor Alex Heslop reported on progress of the Choice Based Lettings Review. The Working Group had carried out an informative and useful visit to the East London Lettings Company (ELLC). The Group considered how the ELLC operates and came back with some points for consideration, including the IT system and provision of information to applicants regarding their bids. The next review session on 10<sup>th</sup> March would look at the merits and demerits of Tower Hamlets joining the ELLC; and would discuss issues around overcrowding with RSL partners.

Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique reported on the progress being made in Translating and Interpreting Services. He explained that the first stage of work will be done through a Challenge Session. Consideration would be given to recent Government guidance on the way local authorities provide translating and interpreting services, as well as the scope for improving ESOL provision and increasing uptake. In the light of this as part of the review Tower Hamlets would be working with the London Borough of Hackney to consider broader implications for East London.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury reported on progress in the Evaluation of NRF Funding. At the last meeting representatives from GOL and EDAW informed members of how successful NRF had been in Tower Hamlets, along with the

challenges facing Tower Hamlets when the Working Neighbourhood Fund is introduced. On 13<sup>th</sup> March a number of NRF funded organisations would give evidence and the group would discuss: What their original objectives were, how this met the NR strategy, how they met the Community plan targets and what difference they made to benefit local people. Councillor Choudhury invited all Members to attend.

In relation to the Determination of Major Planning Applications Challenge Session, Councillor Choudhury informed members that an Action Plan had been developed as attached in the OSC Tracking report.

Councillor Salim Ullah reported on progress in the Evaluation of Tackling Anti Social Behaviour. The last meeting brought together the youth service, Police, Tower Hamlets Partnership and RSLs to discuss how they work together to combat ASB. Councillor Ullah stated that the next meeting would be on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March at 7pm.

In relation to the evaluation of the Effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams Challenge Session, Councillor Ullah explained that an action plan with recommendations had been sent to officers and would shortly be finalised.

Councillor Ahmed Hussain reported on progress in the Scrutiny Review of Young People's participation in sports. The fourth session took place the previous day with the aim of examining the data around take up and fitness levels of young people in the borough. The Working Group agreed to conduct a survey through the Youth Fair, schools, youth centres, third sector organisations, Mile End Hospital and the Tower Hamlets website. Approximately 300 surveys had been returned and the results showed that young people would be keen to engage in a variety of sports. Barriers identified included that fact that many young people did not feel comfortable with going to an activity if they don't know anyone there.

The Chair, Councillor Marc Francis, reported on progress of the Strip Club Review. He explained that work was drawing to a close, with the last meeting scheduled for March 19<sup>th</sup>. The working group had begun to outline their recommendations at the penultimate meeting, which took place on February 21<sup>st</sup> and a draft report was expected next week, for comment from councillors and officers prior to the 19<sup>th</sup>. The final report would then be presented to the Committee in April. Councillors on the working group had examined a wide range of evidence from varied sources.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton reported on progress of the Smoking Cessation Review. She explained that the report was being written up and would be submitted to the April Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the next Health Scrutiny Panel Meeting on 18 March.

In relation to the Health Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Eaton informed members that the next meeting on 18 March 2008 would consider the NHS Trust declarations which are self-assessments against core standards set out by the Healthcare Commission. There would also be a joint borough meeting for

Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney to consider the declaration by the East London and City Mental Health Trust on 27 March 2008.

Councillor Eaton also reported that a meeting of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Healthcare for London was successfully hosted in Tower Hamlets on 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

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

The Committee considered thoroughly the proposed questions to submit to Cabinet and agreed that the following will be referred:

### **Agenda Item 8.1 Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project – Development Framework (CAB 136/078)**

1. How many residents who took part in the consultation on the Blackwall Reach regeneration scheme supported the construction of two tower blocks on the south of the site, and what proportion of respondents does this represent?
2. How many of the 800 affordable homes planned for Blackwall Reach will be social rented homes?
3. At present how many (a) one, (b) two, (c) three and (d) four-bedroom flats/maisonettes are contained within (i) Robin Hood Gardens and (ii) Anderson House, Macrow Walk and Woolmore Street?
4. Further to the answer given on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007, can the Cabinet now confirm whether any of the social rented homes proposed for Blackwall Reach will be built to Parker Morris standards?
5. What assessment has been made of the impact of a forty storey tower block on the setting of the adjacent Naval Row Conservation Area?
6. When does LBTH expect to be notified of a decision on the application to list Robin Hood Gardens?
7. What representations has LBTH received against the demolition of Robin Hood Gardens?
8. At the 11 February full council meeting we had a petition from the local residents of Robin Hood Gardens; implying that they have been misled by the Council and, that they are eager to stay with the Council and do not want to change to any other partners; can the Cabinet ensure that their wishes will be taken into consideration, if they are how will it be provided?

9. Will consideration be given to a continuation of the existing security of tenure of the petitioners in respect of both the social housing and the youth facilities?

**Agenda Item 8.2 Draft – Ocean New Deal for Communities – Delivery Plan for 2008/09 (CAB 137/078)**

1. What local consultation has been carried out in determining priorities in the new delivery plan?
2. What are we doing to effectively meet the priority of empowering and encouraging local residents and community groups such as the Ocean Tenants and Leaseholders Association to participate fully in their community, in strategic decision-making and delivery of local services?
3. In the new governance structure there are only 3 residents and with little or no third sector participation. How does the new governance structure effectively reflect local community involvement?
4. In regards to Community facilities, what were the outcomes from the community consultation, what and where are they [facilities] going to be located, will existing buildings be refurbished or new ones built and who will be running them?
5. Which department will be responsible for managing the Ocean Regeneration Trust? Who will be the Lead Officers? What steps will the department take to ensure that staff who have been or will be recruited, have the right experience?
6. What assurances can be given that NDC's remaining capital money [£18m] will be spent by the end of the ONDC programme? Can a breakdown be given of how this money will be spent?

**Agenda Item 10.1 Disposal of Properties at 2 Jubilee Street; 22-28 Underwood Road and 117 Poplar High Street (CAB 141/078)**

1. Which other disposals since May 2006 have been by informal tender?
2. What measures are in place to ensure that the disposal of these sites via informal tender process achieves best value?
3. What safeguards are in place to ensure that Poplar Town Hall is not converted into residential flats?
4. Has the Council considered the merits/demerits of selling a long lease rather than the freehold interest in the premises? Is there any scope for a community land trust so that the assets are retained for the benefit of the community and not resold to a private developer at some stage in the future?

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

Nil Items

**14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED**

That, under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of the Section Two business on the grounds that it contains information defined as Exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.

**15. SECTION TWO REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

There were no Section Two reports called in from the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

**16. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF SECTION TWO (RESTRICTED) CABINET PAPERS**

The Committee considered a number of proposed questions for submission to the Cabinet in relation to Cabinet Agenda Item 20.1 - St Matthias Site Disposal (CAB 146/078), and agreed that a number of questions be referred.

**17. ANY OTHER SECTION TWO (RESTRICTED) BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil Items

The meeting ended at 10.15 p.m.

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee