

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report**

**Tower Hamlets Council
May 2008**



TOWER HAMLETS

Index

	Page
Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets	3
Overview and Scrutiny Cllr Marc Francis, Chair	5
Living Well Cllr Alex Heslop, Vice-Chair	11
Creating and Sharing Prosperity Cllr Alibor Choudhury	12
Excellent Public Services Cllr Mohammed Abdus Salique	13
Living Safely Cllr Salim Ullah	15
Learning Achievement and Leisure Cllr Ahmed Hussain	16
Health Scrutiny Panel Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton	18

Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets

Overview and Scrutiny looks at how the Council and its partners deliver services so that they meet local needs and contribute to the overall vision in the borough's Community Plan. It also monitors the decisions made by the Council's Cabinet to make sure that they are robust and provide good value for money.

Overview and Scrutiny has statutory powers to review and scrutinise local health services and make recommendations to NHS bodies. It also considers other issues of concern to local people, including services provided by other organisations, and advises the Cabinet, Council and sometimes other partners, on how those policies and services can be improved.

Membership

The Committee coordinates all Overview and Scrutiny work. Reflecting the overall political balance of the Council during 2007/08 the Committee's membership comprised five Labour councillors and one each from the Respect, Liberal Democrat, Respect (Unity Coalition) and Conservative parties.

As well as the councillors, five other people served on the Committee. They have specific responsibilities for education. There were two representatives appointed by the Anglican and Roman Catholic Dioceses. There were also two parent governors. Each of these representatives can contribute to any matters discussed by the Committee but they can only vote on education issues. The final member was a non-voting representative of the Muslim community for education issues. The decision to have this position was a local one in recognition of the large Muslim community in the borough.

Scrutiny Chair and Leads

The Chair of the Committee in 2007/08 was Councillor Marc Francis. The Chair oversees the work programme of the committee as well as taking a lead on monitoring the Council's budget.

There are six 'Scrutiny Leads': one for each of the themes in the Tower Hamlets Community Plan, with a further lead on health issues. The Scrutiny Leads were:

- Cllr Alex Heslop (Labour) for "living well" focusing on improving housing and social care and Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr Alibor Choudhury (Labour) for "creating and sharing prosperity" focusing on bringing investment into the borough and ensuring residents and businesses benefit from growing economic prosperity
- Cllr Mohammed Abdus Salique (Labour) for "excellent public services" focusing on improving public services to make sure they represent good value for money and meet local needs
- Cllr Salim Ullah (Labour) for "living safely" focusing on reducing crime, making people feel safer and creating a more secure and cleaner environment
- Cllr Ahmed Hussain (Respect/Conservative) for "learning, achievement and leisure" focusing on raising educational aspirations, expectations and achievement, providing a wide range of arts and leisure, and celebrating the diversity of the community
- Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton (Liberal Democrats) for "health", through the Health Scrutiny Panel, focusing on improving local health services and the co-ordination of different health service providers within the borough

The Scrutiny Leads actively promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny with residents, partners and other stakeholders. They also pick up any relevant issues on behalf of the Committee as a whole and led the working groups within their theme.

There are two non-executive Members who also sit on the Committee. These were:

Cllr Shahed Ali – June 07 – May 08

Cllr Peter Golds – June 07 – February 08

Cllr Oliur Rahman – February 08 – May 08

They have contributed both to the work of the Committee and Scrutiny Review Groups. In particular their contribution on the call-ins, scrutiny spotlights and performance monitoring have been really useful in holding the Executive to account and also ensuring that our services meet the needs of our local residents. They have also been actively involved in a number of the Scrutiny Review Working Groups and have contributed to the formation of a number of recommendations from those groups.

What does Overview and Scrutiny do?

The Committee:

- looks at how the Council is performing by monitoring key strategies and plans
- looks at the Council's budget and how it uses its resources
- sets up time-limited working groups to look at issues in depth and make proposals for change. Suggestions for topics may come from elected Members, full Council, the Cabinet or from local organisations and residents.
- considers decisions made by the Cabinet that are 'called in'. This happens if there is concern about the decision or what information was considered
- reviews briefly the reports that are going to Cabinet for decision and raises any concerns.

As the Committee has such a broad responsibility, it focuses on a number of key priorities each year. These make up an annual work programme for each of the Scrutiny Leads. For each area there is usually one in-depth review, as well as other shorter pieces of work.

Health Scrutiny

The Government has given local councils specific responsibilities to scrutinise health services. The Health Scrutiny Panel was set up to do this and can look at any matter relating to health services within the borough, including hospital and GP services, health promotion and prevention. This includes the way that health services are planned, how services are provided and how NHS organisations consult with local people.

Under the Healthcare Commission's new Annual Healthcheck for all NHS trusts, the Health Scrutiny Panel can comment on local Trusts' declarations against 24 Core Standards. These cover seven areas: safety, clinical and cost effectiveness, governance, patient focus, accessible and responsive care, care environment and amenities and public health. There is also a duty on local health services to consult with the Health Scrutiny Panel if they are making substantial changes to services.

Annual Report

This report provides a brief summary of the work of Overview and Scrutiny in 2007/08. Each member of the Committee outlines the work that they have undertaken both in the reviews that they have led and also their work on the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillor Marc Francis, Chair

This is the fourth year since we changed our arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets. These arrangements include:

- a single co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- five Scrutiny Leads scrutinising the Community Plan themes and one for Health matters
- pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet reports
- performance monitoring by considering the Tower Hamlets Index, Strategic Plan, the Diversity and Equality Action Plan, Corporate Complaints and Members' Enquiries
- a robust call-in procedure

We agreed a challenging and extensive work programme in July 2007 and I believe we have delivered on the majority of it. Over the year, we regularly monitored our progress to make sure we remained on track to complete our work.

This year, we have improved significantly the engagement with Lead Members at Committee. They have presented the majority of reports within their portfolio that the Committee considered, as well as responding to call-ins. This is really important in making sure we hold the Executive directly to account and encouraging more discussion and debate among councillors.

There has also been a good level of engagement with the public. Firstly, the majority of our reviews sought the views and experiences of local people through visits and focus groups. And secondly, a number of deputations were made by members of the public at Committee, usually related to a call-in that was being considered.

Performance Monitoring

We monitor the Tower Hamlets Index (THI) every two months and twice a year the Council's Strategic Plan and Diversity and Equality Action Plan. We are the only formal councillor forum that does this and it's important in making sure that our services are performing well. I believe this worked effectively and helped Overview and Scrutiny understand and comment on the wider performance of services - a key part of improving the quality of life of local people.

We also had monthly Scrutiny Spotlights at our Committee meetings for most of the Cabinet Members including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. At all the sessions Lead Members discussed the performance and challenges facing services in their area of responsibility. This was particularly useful for us to discuss issues of concern and suggest ways performance could be improved. It also helped involve Lead Members more in the scrutiny process and several of them commented how useful they found the opportunity to discuss policy and performance issues with non-executive councillors at Committee. The Leader of the Council at her spotlight session commented 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*".

The Committee consistently challenged Cabinet Members on areas of underperformance, including library use, housing repairs and perhaps most importantly on recycling. This last area was subject to a full-scale scrutiny review in 2006/07, and the committee was determined to ensure the implementation of those changes recommended in the final report.

We also considered the Council's annual Corporate and Social Care Complaints report and an update on the Members' Enquiries system and performance. All councillors were pleased to see the improved performance in responding to both complaints and Members' enquiries. Councillors take up many complaints each year, and getting a quick and full response is an essential part of that work.

Policy Framework

Within the Council's Policy and Budget Framework there are a number of key policy documents that set out how the Council will act. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider these before Council agrees them and this year we discussed the following:

- **Licensing Authority Policy Statement**
The Committee welcomed and supported the Licensing Authority Policy Statement and recognised the extensive consultation that had occurred in its development. We agreed that the changes in the Statement will result in a more transparent licensing process and greater regulation and control of premises' activities. The Committee reinforced the importance of continuing improvement to the Licensing Policy and looks forward to the incorporation of the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review Panel's investigation of the Licensing of Strip clubs.
- **Statement on Community Involvement**
The Committee examined the Statement of Community Involvement and welcomed the consultation process that had been undertaken. The Committee acknowledged the importance of the document regarding the future of the Council and stressed the importance of facilitating effective community engagement in all aspects of planning. The Committee noted that at the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Determination of Major Planning Applications it was agreed that residents needed to be more involved and that all documents relating to this issue are made accessible to residents of the borough.
- **Youth Justice Plan 2008/2009**
We welcomed the Youth Justice Plan and the contribution it will make to public safety in Tower Hamlets. We did raise a number of issues for Cabinet to consider which included quality of secure accommodation for young people, challenges faced in improving youth justice, sentencing trends, significant representation of Black and mixed raced boys in the criminal justice system, improved diversionary activities and that the issue of radicalisation should be explored in the Plan. The committee was particularly impressed with the Lead Member, Councillor Clair Hawkins, proposal for a Commission on Public Safety for Young People.
- **Disposal of Former Bishop Challoner School Site – Christian Street and Adjoining Playing Fields – Update Report**
Cabinet referred this report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments before they made their decision. The Committee welcomed this opportunity and sought assurances from the Cabinet about minimising length of time when the sports field and community centre would be unavailable, ensuring no net loss of open space, negotiating with the developer to increase the percentage of affordable homes and that local residents should be fully consulted throughout the process.

Scrutiny of the Budget

We considered the Council's budget at two of our meetings.

In July we considered the Financial Outlook report and supported the Council's approach. We recognised the Council's strong record on financial management but on specific elements and supported the inclusion of third sector grants / service level agreements in the base budgets for the purpose of calculating saving targets. However, we felt the following areas needed further consideration:

1. Maximising lobbying activities regarding the potential loss of £3m in the social care budget as a result of the removal of "damping" provisions;
2. That resourcing in Democratic Services be continued at current level to ensure Members are able to undertake their role fully;
3. Continuing to develop and refine our planning for the future, especially medium term financial planning and around reserves and contingencies

In February, we considered Cabinet's budget proposals for 2008/09. Committee members challenged the Lead Member for Resources & Performance about the quality of consultation with residents and asked for improvements in future years. We also looked in detail at concerns raised by trade unions about the efficiency savings in Adult Services and the impact these would have on local residents, but concluded that these savings were appropriate. Finally, we welcomed the significantly increased investment in frontline services and supported the 3.5 per cent increase in Council Tax.

Pre-decision scrutiny

The committee can submit questions about Cabinet reports before a decision is taken. I feel we have strengthened this over the year and commented on 65 Cabinet reports (compared to 41 last year). Among these were:

- Award for Contract for Taxi, Coach and Minibus Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs and Adults with Care Plan
- Olympic Legacy – Securing Benefits for Tower Hamlets from the future use of venues
- Tower Hamlets Local Area Agreement – End of Year Review
- Housing Investment Strategy – Establishment of Tower Hamlets Homes
- Rich Mix Cultural Centre
- Progressing Leaseholder Buy-backs to enable RSL Regeneration Scheme
- Parking Plan – Results of Consultation on Hours of Parking Controls in A6 and C3 mini Zones
- Hostel and Move-on Strategy
- Options for Multi-Faith Burial Facility for Tower Hamlets
- Annual Performance Assessment of Adult Social Care 2006/07

Our questions and concerns provided further information at Cabinet and clarified some uncertainties thus improving the decision-making process. The responses also inform councillors' decisions over call-ins. For instance, as a result of pre-decision questions, Cabinet have referred the report on Integrated Commissioning of Health and Social Care services for adults to the Health Scrutiny Panel.

Call-ins

The Committee has considered sixteen call-ins this year. This is a slight decrease from last year when there were 19.

Report Called-in

Review of the Inclusion (SEN) Strategy

O&S Decision

Confirmed

Tower Hamlets Environmental Strategy 2007 to 2010

Confirmed

Housing Investment Strategy 2007/08 to 2011/12

Confirmed

Transfer of the Teviot, Brownfield, Aberfeldy Estates

Confirmed

Ocean NDC Delivery Plan

Confirmed

Disposal of Former Bishop Challoner School Site

Referred back to Cabinet

Waste Disposal Contract - The Way Forward

Confirmed

Housing Investment Strategy - Establishment of Tower Hamlets Homes

Confirmed

Residential care for Older People in Tower Hamlets

Confirmed

Progressing Leaseholder Buy Backs to Enable RSL Regeneration Schemes

Confirmed

2 Gladstone Place - Granting of Development Lease

Referred back to Cabinet

Whitechapel Centre

Confirmed

Review of Street Markets Fees and Charges 2008/09

Confirmed

Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project - Development Framework

Referred back to Cabinet

Draft Ocean New Deal for Communities Delivery Plan 2008/9

Confirmed

Disposal of land at 10 Backchurch Lane E1

Referred back to Cabinet

Debate of the call-ins was robust and rigorous. We confirmed twelve decisions although on a number of these the Lead Members gave assurances that they would take some of the concerns raised on board. For example, on the Residential care for Older People in Tower Hamlets the Corporate Director, Adults Health and Wellbeing, re-negotiated a better contract for the Council providing value for money. We asked Cabinet to reconsider the other four call-ins. Disappointingly, Cabinet reconfirmed its decision on the first three of these. However, our alternative course of action on the disposal of 10 Backchurch Lane did help prompt Cabinet to adopt a more sustainable way forward in handling this disposal.

It is also worth highlighting that because of the items called in, attendance by local people and other councillors has increased substantially at the Committee meetings. This helps increase the profile of scrutiny and highlight the important role it has within the borough.

Co-opted and Appointed Representatives

After the difficulty in appointing all of the co-opted Members last year we have now managed to recruit the two parent governors and three faith representatives. We organised an Induction Session for co-opted members and considered how we could develop their role and help them be more effective. The Muslim Community Faith representative attended the Challenge Session on re-visiting the Youth Service Plan Scrutiny Review and commented on how useful it was to see how the department had taken forward the groups recommendations. He was also involved in the initial review and suggested a number of ways the service could continue its progress.

We intend to build on this further next year to enable co-opted Members to help us engage more local residents in the scrutiny process and ensure that more of their concerns come to the Committee's attention.

Raising the Profile

We continue to improve how and when we communicate with Members, Officers and the public. We used the weekly Members' Bulletin regularly. The Manager's Briefing and the staff newsletter, *Pulling Together*, were also used to promote scrutiny work, so that council officers are well informed about the scrutiny work programme, upcoming reviews, review findings, and how they can assist.

East End Life and our Scrutiny web pages are also vehicles to keep residents informed about the work scrutiny was undertaking. A number of the reviews attracted significant interest from local people, particularly the Licensing of Strip Clubs and tackling anti-social behaviour. More detail of these is included in the reports by the Scrutiny Leads.

The Scrutiny review from 2003/04 - 'Employment & Cohesion' - was recognised as an example of good practice by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. They highlighted how equalities issues can be incorporated into the scrutiny review process to improve performance and also reach out to hard to reach communities. In their publication, 'Equal to the Task', they highlighted the good practice and recommended it to other councils. This along with the recent restructure of the Chief Executive's Directorate which created the Scrutiny and Equalities Service Team was an opportunity to highlight the importance of combining tackling inequality with strengthening community leadership. Officers from the Scrutiny Team have presented on this both at national and regional conferences and events.

Checking our own progress

Twice a year we monitor the recommendations we have made, not just those at committee but also those from our reviews and other investigations. Services are asked to provide an update so we can see whether progress is being made. The latest monitoring indicates that nearly all of our recommendations since July 2004 are being acted on or achieved. We also held two challenge sessions to revisit reviews undertaken last year and in 2004/05. This included the reviews on access to GP/dentistry services and the Youth Service Plan both of which are further described by the Scrutiny Leads within this annual report. I feel these sessions have highlighted the impact scrutiny has on service delivery and helped us think about how to improve the scrutiny process.

One key area of improvement that the committee needs to focus on in future years is the level of participation by back bench councillors in the Scrutiny Reviews. We recognise that members have many other commitments and that the meetings were mostly packed into a three-month period after Christmas. Nevertheless, these reviews were heavily dependent upon the involvement of a small group of committed councillors. We hope that each of the Party Leaders will encourage all members of their Political Group to take an interest in at least one of the Scrutiny Reviews in future.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

We have begun work with colleagues across the Council and our partners in developing a pilot for the Councillor Call for Action. Discussions are underway and we hope to incorporate this into our work programme for next year, depending on when guidance from the government is published

Licensing of Strip Clubs

In addition to the scrutiny reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Leads this year, I also led one on the Licensing of Strip Clubs. This review arose from a Council motion with cross-party support, and sought to get to grips with an issue that has provoked strong feelings from many residents. Throughout the course of the review, questions of morality were never far from the

surface, but Members were careful to ascertain what *could* be done before deciding on what *should* be done.

The Working Group held sessions with officers from the Council's Licensing and Legal team, the Police, residents, and officers from several other London authorities. We also considered evidence – best practice, case studies, and data – gathered from sources across the country, in order to come to our conclusions and recommendations.

We have proposed a series of practical recommendations –notably around increased levels of enforcement, advertising, consultation with residents on new applications, and an exploration of existing policies and legislation to see if more could be done. We also recommended lobbying the Government for legislation change, with the support of local and national groups and other authorities.

Residents acknowledged the review as a signal of the Council taking their concerns more seriously, and clearly felt pleased with the level of input they were able to have into the process. The review served as a good example of how Scrutiny can enable the Council to engage with residents on important issues, and take positive action.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has made considerable progress this year. In particular, having Lead Members attend the Committee to present reports and outline the reasons for decisions has significantly enhanced the role and value of scrutiny. We are holding the Executive to account - particularly around performance monitoring and through considering call-ins – and influencing Cabinet decisions. The reviews have also made an important contribution to addressing local people's concerns – for example, around tackling anti-social behaviour, licensing of strip clubs – and worked with partners, officers and other councillors to improve services.

In the pipeline are Government proposals to extend the role of scrutiny around health consultation and working with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) to monitor and implement Local Area Agreements (LAA). This is an exciting time to be part of Scrutiny and I believe that our work this year has equipped us to strengthen the impact of the committee in the future.

As Scrutiny Lead for Living Well, my remit covers housing, health and social care, and promoting healthy living. As the Choice Based Lettings Scheme continues to generate a large number of Members Enquiries and much local interest, I wanted to review it to check how accessible the Scheme is and consider its wider impact on families and individuals.

Scrutiny Review: Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Alongside the high volume of Members Enquiries on Choice Based Lettings, overcrowding and homelessness are established challenges for the borough. The review focused on accessibility of the scheme particularly for older and disabled people. It was an extensive review which looked at medical assessments, homelessness, resident and stakeholder understanding of the Scheme and policy and transparency of decision making in allocating properties.

I facilitated a service improvement focus group of both users and providers which proved to be invaluable by identifying particular issues around access and community understanding. We also visited the East London Lettings Company to learn about how other service providers meet the challenges of improving access and community understanding.

Key issues noted by the Working Group were the complexities of managing the policy and the varying level of community understanding of the Scheme.

It has been a challenging and exciting review to work on but I believe we have come up with some challenging recommendations focusing on the following key themes:

- Improving customer access and community cohesion
- Improving quality and outcomes for community groups
- Tackling overcrowding
- Widening choice and access to social housing

For example we have recommended introducing allocation of social housing based on waiting time on the housing register, this issue has been debated in Housing for a number of years, now it is time to look at how this might work in practice. There is a possibility that Housing services could potentially join the East London Lettings Company which is an exciting opportunity to look at how access can be expanded with prospects for residents to get real-time feedback on any bids they make, addressing many local concerns.

The review concluded that the service has a challenge in providing housing in the context of high demand, acute housing needs and insufficient supply. The Scrutiny Review provides an opportunity to address service improvements and supports the proposed service improvement agenda of the Arms Length Management Organisation.

Conclusion

Although the Housing Department have pioneered the Accessible Housing Register, improved information for disabled people and is recognised for the work on overcrowding, we cannot stand still in striving to improve the service given its impact on many of the most vulnerable members of our community. We hope our recommendations provide a starting point for the debate about how these improvements are achieved.

Despite the developments around Canary Wharf and the City, Tower Hamlets remains one of the most deprived boroughs in the Country. Although progress has been dramatic in many areas over recent years, we remain determined to accelerate improvement even further. As Scrutiny Lead for Creating and Sharing Prosperity I wanted to explore the partnership approach we have taken to tackle deprivation locally and achieve lasting renewal.

Evaluating NRF

When deciding on my work programme I wanted to focus on the reality that in our borough poverty is still experienced by too many people evidenced by the high uptake of means tested benefits, high unemployment and worklessness and high crime rates. Consequently I was determined to focus my work on what we are doing to create better outcomes in our most deprived areas.

I decided to undertake a review on evaluating the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), to see how this funding has contributed to the improvement of our deprived areas. Over the course of the review, the working group heard evidence from the Tower Hamlets Partnership on how it approached the allocation of NRF to improve mainstream provisions. We also met with Chairs and Vice-chairs from the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) to discuss how NRF has made a difference in their localities. Furthermore we held a session with Council officers from the Children Looked after Central Team and Access to Employment Team both of them managed projects funded by NRF, to discuss if there had been a narrowing of the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest.

I feel the review has successfully identified recommendations for allocating future regeneration grants in particular the new Working Neighbourhood Fund. It has also highlighted the important role Members, LAP representatives and local residents need to play in identifying priorities and leading on the implementation of some of the projects.

Major Planning Applications

We seek to improve the quality of life of the people living, working, and visiting Tower Hamlets by ensuring there are opportunities for high quality development. I was interested to know more about how the Council determines major planning applications and chaired a challenge session to increase understanding and awareness of the pre-planning application process. The Group made strong recommendations about consultation and involvement that I hope will help inform and involve residents when major planning applications are made.

Conclusion

As Scrutiny Lead for Creating and Sharing Prosperity, I believe evaluating how NRF has been spent and how major planning applications are determined will help to address local needs. I believe the Council and our partner agencies need to continue to deliver real change in reviving economies, creating safer communities and offering high quality public services.

The Excellent Public Services Scrutiny portfolio is wide-ranging, cutting across all Council Directorates and services provided by our partners. My role on Overview and Scrutiny this year has been to ensure we are providing value for money and are delivering services in ways that meet local needs.

Use of Consultants

This year's review focused on the way we procure consultancy services within the Council. The review recognised that consultants are needed to lever in additional resources and skills. At the same time it is important to ensure that we achieve maximum value for money and that the Council considers using existing staff or builds in skills transfer and staff training wherever possible.

The key aims of the review were to look at the circumstances in which Consultants are used by Directorates and to explore current practices in engaging and managing consultant contracts. Therefore the working group reviewed expenditure on consultants from 2005/06 onwards and looked at a number of case studies. These included the use of consultants to deliver business process improvement exercises and in developing the borough's Masterplans (spatial planning documents).

We found that there was sometimes a lack of coherence about how consultants should be contracted and differences between Directorates about defining consultants which meant that there were different methods for recording expenditure. The working group welcomed the downward trend in the proportion of spend on consultants and that the majority of consultants were being used to deliver short term project work or to meet statutory regulations which require third party involvement for example to carry out Environmental Impact Assessments.

The review recommendations included the proposal for a corporate definition of consultants and the promotion of good practice to procure consultants in the future by the Council.

Translating and Interpreting Services

The provision of translation and interpreting services by local authorities has been a major area of focus following the completion of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. There have been a number of recent government briefings and guidance documents covering the emerging debate on the need to promote English language skills as a tool for developing community cohesion provided the background for reviewing our own service provision in this area. The Challenge Session explored the issues in greater detail to understand the impact of these policy developments on local communities in the borough.

The Council will be looking to compare findings of this Challenge Session with London Borough of Hackney in the next municipal year.

Conclusion

This has been a productive year because I think that the recommendations of the review will help to achieve value for money and increase the use of existing staff and encourage employee skills development in a much more coherent and consistent way across the Council. I believe this will improve the transparency of the way we work and improve services for local people.

We expect everyone to take pleasure in living and working in Tower Hamlets, without the fear of violence, intimidation and attack. But crime still remains at the top of the list of concerns for most residents. As Scrutiny Lead for Living Safely I wanted to investigate the extent of Anti-Social behaviour in Tower Hamlets and the effectiveness of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams in our Wards.

Tackling Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)

Anti-Social Behaviour can range from serious violence and harassment to noisy neighbours and dumping rubbish but any of these can be distressing to both individual and the whole community. I decided to focus on a review exploring the possible future direction of the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour strategy, in line with national developments and policy.

Over the course of the review, the working group met officers from the Tower Hamlets Community Safety Service and representatives from the Local Strategic Partnership including officers from the Metropolitan Police Service and the Tower Hamlets Youth Service. We also held a couple of focus groups with local residents and young people to hear different perspectives of how ASB should be tackled.

I believe we have to continue to see ASB as a major area of residents' concerns. The working group have requested that officers from the Council and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) provide information on how they are meeting the six strands of the Respect agenda. This would include supporting families particularly the most challenging ones, improving behaviour and attendance in schools, activities for children and young people, strengthening communities through effective enforcement and community justice. It is my belief that our recommendations are robust and will assist the Council's fight to continue to reduce ASB.

Effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs)

SNTs are trained to communicate with a wide range of people, communities and partners, to tackle and solve community problems about quality of local life, for instance ASB, criminal damage, abandoned vehicles and graffiti. I chaired a one-off challenge session to evaluate the role of SNTs on our streets. Key recommendations arising from this session included; greater advertising of the role of SNTs so that residents are aware of their work and the need to improve the retention rates of officers.

Conclusion

ASB is an important issue consistently raised as an area of concern in Annual Residents Survey and we need to remain focused to find solutions. With the help of officers, guided by the Tower Hamlets ASB strategy statement and Partner agencies I am confident that we will continue to see a steady decline in ASB activity. Furthermore I am a strong advocate of SNTs and hope that we can look to increase the number of teams in all our wards in the foreseeable future to continue their good work.

As Scrutiny Lead for Learning, Achievement and Leisure, my remit focuses on raising educational aspirations, expectations and achievement, providing the widest range of arts and leisure opportunities for all and celebrating the rich cultural diversity of our communities. With the Olympics on our doorstep I wanted to focus on leisure services and access particularly for young disabled people. I was keen to ensure that young people of all abilities increase their participation in sports leading up to 2012. I also undertook a Scrutiny Challenge Session to revisit a previous scrutiny review on the Youth Service Plan.

Scrutiny Challenge Session: Youth Service Plan

In the Challenge Session I set out to examine the progress of a previous scrutiny review on Youth Service Plan and the impact this had on service delivery. At the same time it was an opportunity to reflect on the role of scrutiny. Youth service is important in Tower Hamlets particularly because of the high proportion of young people and changing population and I wanted to make sure that more recent concerns were brought to the attention of the service through this challenge session.

The Working Group made a number of recommendations around further involving and developing Member understanding, involving local voices in service planning and delivery, and supporting and improving access for community groups.

Scrutiny Review: Young People's participation in sports leading up to the Olympics

Tower Hamlets is one of the host boroughs for the Olympics which is a fantastic opportunity for us all. I wanted to make sure young people get an opportunity to take part in the momentum generated by the Olympics and be encouraged to take up more sports and physical activities and improve their health.

Young people should strongly influence decisions we make. I talked to young people at the Youth Fair, local leisure centres, through schools, youth centres, third sector organisations and parents and carers at the Mile End Hospital Children with Disabilities Physiotherapy Department. Their views were invaluable in helping us to agree the final recommendations.

Having considered current initiatives and the views of local people, key recommendations to come out of the review focused on the themes below:

- Supporting and improving access;
- Experiencing the Games;
- Partnership working and,
- Focusing on health.

For example young people said they are interested in playing and training in a range of sports and we have recommended that the service provides coaching and training based on the expressions of interest by young people, including making provisions as part of the Building Schools for the Future Programme. I'm excited by the potential the Olympics has to offer for local young people, recommendations framed around partnership working and experiencing the Games will open many doors to our young people in terms of their experience of engagement with young people in other host boroughs and giving them access to world class facilities that the Olympics will offer.

A new development arising from this scrutiny review was the production of a short DVD to illustrate how scrutiny works, and how the community leadership role of councillors can lead to change and influence decisions after listening to the voices of local people.

Conclusion

I am pleased that we have such fantastic facilities in Tower Hamlets and that the opportunities offered by the Olympics should help us establish contact between different groups in different boroughs and promote community cohesion. I am looking forward to seeing this work progress.

Health Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Dr Stephanie Eaton

The Health Scrutiny Panel undertakes the Council's functions under the Health and Social Care Act, 2001. The Panel includes members who are co-opted from the three NHS Trust Patient Public Involvement (PPI) forums to represent patient views. Next year the establishment of the Local Involvement Network will replace the forums and I would like to take the opportunity to thank Dr Amjad Rahi from the Barts and the London NHS Forum, Mr Nuruz Jaman from the Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust Forum and Mr John Lee from the East London NHS Foundation Trust Forum for their contributions. I would also like to thank Councillor Dr Emma Jones (Vice-Chair) who kindly chaired meetings in my absence.

This was the second year of the four year work programme developed by the Health Scrutiny Panel. We looked to build on the work undertaken last year by still retaining our focus on reducing health inequalities. We undertook a Challenge Session in which we were pleased to note the progress in implementing the recommendations from last year's review on access to GP/ dentistry services.

The Panel undertook two service visits this year. At the Barkantine Centre Members were given a tour of the facilities available at the new centre. We also visited the East London NHS Foundation Trust at their base in Mile End Hospital. Both these visits were useful in developing the panel's relationship with the Trusts and understanding of service provision by the NHS.

Tobacco and Smoking Cessation

The key Health Scrutiny review this year looked at Tobacco and Smoking Cessation both from the perspective of Health Services and in terms of the Tobacco Control work carried out by the Council's Trading Standards team.

The Health Scrutiny Panel took a distinctively local approach to the problems that arise in our community from the use of tobacco products. We looked at the supply of cheap (often illegal) tobacco products through our street markets, and researched the availability of these to young people. The review also considered the high smoking prevalence among Bangladeshi men and the use of paan more widely in Bangladeshi homes.

A key part of the review focused on the materials used to promote tobacco cessation and the Panel were surprised at the lack of any comprehensive evaluation of 'what works'. There was also anecdotal evidence that health care workers such as midwives, occupational therapists and community mental health workers struggle to include smoking cessation advice with their other guidance and support to patients.

The recommendations cover a range of areas including the need to improve data collection, local engagement strategies, the evidence base, enforcement and advice to retailers. We hope that these recommendations will be implemented quickly and in full. The human and financial cost to our community of continued ill health and premature death demands we address the threat of tobacco with vigour and urgency.

Shah Jalal Medical Centre

This year the Panel held a number of additional meetings to investigate reports of problems at the Shah Jalal Medical Centre, both in terms of the appointments system and issues around the physical accessibility and treatment of patients. We welcome the significant measures taken by the PCT to respond to the issues raised and the positive impact this has had for patients using the practice. At the final meeting to discuss the issue the PCT reported that the

phone system had been changed to allow more people to get through and staff were being trained to improve the levels of customer care and that the new measures had already started to improve services for patients.

Pan-London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The NHS London report, Healthcare for London: A Framework for Action has set out a radical vision for how healthcare services would be provided in the future. Authorities across London including from neighbouring Counties convened the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) to prepare a response to the consultation on the proposals.

Both I and Cllr Marc Francis were nominated to represent the borough on the JOSC and it has been a challenging experience where we have engaged with complex health issues considering both local needs and the need to develop a strategic-level voice on London-wide issues.

There are wide-ranging recommendations emerging from the JOSC bringing issues such as transport, patient involvement, equalities and equity of service provision to the fore. We look forward to the NHS London response to our findings and recommendations.

The Annual Healthcheck

The Healthcare Commission assesses all NHS Trusts in the UK against 24 Core Standards covering the seven areas of safety, clinical and cost effectiveness, governance, patient focus, accessible and responsive care, care environment and amenities and public health.

The Panel reviewed the Annual Healthcheck Declarations of all three Trusts as part of the Annual Healthcheck process and has provided comments based on evidence gathered over the past year.

The issues raised included the poor performance of Maternity Services at Barts and the London Hospital, the need for more Bangladeshi Nurses and used the findings of the tobacco and smoking cessation review to comment on the Trusts' self-assessment. I am pleased that all the Trusts responded positively to our comments and are taking measures to address them.

Conclusion

It has been another positive and very full year for the Health Scrutiny Panel. We have carried out an ambitious review and responded flexibly to local concerns such as working to resolve the problems experienced at the Shah Jalal Medical Centre. At the last meeting of the Panel we also considered a Draft Health Scrutiny Protocol which I hope will be reviewed and adopted in the coming year and help to continue to develop a closer working relationship with the three NHS Trusts serving the borough.

Scrutiny and Equalities in Tower Hamlets

If you want to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets, please contact the Scrutiny Policy Team:

Please contact:

Scrutiny Policy Team
Tower Hamlets Council
6th Floor, Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London
E14 2BG

Tel: 0207 364 4636
Email: scrutiny@towerhamlets.gov.uk
Web: towerhamlets.gov.uk/scrutiny