

<p style="text-align: center;">Non-Executive Report of the: Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1st September 2016</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Melanie Clay, Director of Law, Probity and Governance Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director Development and Renewal</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Challenge session progress update – Supporting the delivery of successful town centres (high streets and markets)</p>	

<p>Originating Officer(s)</p>	<p>Chris Holme, Service Head Resources and Economic Development</p> <p>Owen Whalley, Service Head Planning and Building Control</p> <p>Kevin Kewin, Interim Service Head Corporate Strategy and Equality</p> <p>Vicky Allen, Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>

Summary

This report follows up from the scrutiny challenge session on supporting the delivery of successful town centres (high streets and markets). The report and recommendations were agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2015. An action plan was developed to address the recommendations. The report and accompanying action plan was endorsed by Cabinet in December 2015. This report reviews the progress against the original recommendations.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress of the recommendations from the scrutiny challenge session.

1. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The aim of the challenge session was to identify what interventions the Council could make that would be transformative in supporting the economic regeneration of the Borough's town centres.
- 1.2 The report (Appendix One) made sixteen recommendations. Progress against each recommendation is recorded in the accompanying action plan (Appendix Two).
- 1.3 Of the 42 actions developed by services in the scrutiny action plan, 21 were due to be completed in 2015/16 and the remaining 21 are scheduled to complete in 2016/17. There has been progress on the majority of actions despite slippage in the delivery dates, which was mainly caused by a delay in implementing a restructure in the economic development service, and a delay in receiving the GLA grant agreement of the New Homes Bonus funding for the Healthy High Streets work.
- 1.4 Appointments to the Town Centre and High Streets Manager and the High Streets Manager on short term contracts commenced in June 2016. This has enabled the development of a highly experienced team in a relatively short timeframe. These new posts join the existing Roman Road Town Centre Manager and Project Officer posts to complete the Town Centre team.
- 1.5 Work has now completed on pulling together the existing research, audits and information on District Centres, to complete work on area profiles demonstrating commercial concentrations as destinations. Key indicators are being developed to underpin these area profiles. The requirements for procurement of consultants to undertake the Town Centre Strategy are being established and a proposal developed to ensure that the key deadlines are met. The pilot area/s for the project are being analyzed and a proposal is being developed for approval in October 2016.
- 1.6 Work has also been developed to take forward Town Centre activities in the following areas:
 - Brick Lane: an Officers' Working Group has been brought together to oversee the development and delivery of an Improvement Plan. This is focused on a number of key areas – vision and offer; hygiene factors; management of the area; community engagement; planning and heritage; culture and activation of the area and business engagement and involvement. Early win activity is underway with a deep clean and refuse collection times review. A Food Festival is being planned for December, alongside Festive lighting. Recruitment of a Town Centre Manager is now underway.

- Roman Road: the shopfront improvement and vacant property initiative is underway. Good working relationships have been developed with the Roman Road Trust to support their activities. A very successful festival was held in July organized by the Trust.
- Whitechapel: Feasibility activity is continuing with the completion of a Retail Capacity Study for the area. The recommendations are currently being considered.
- Chrisp Street: Poplar HARCA are developing proposals for Chrisp Street Market as part of their broader regeneration programme that forms part of the Poplar Riverside Housing Zone. The regeneration activity aims to rejuvenate and revitalize the existing District Centre by maintaining, enhancing and increasing the supply of town centre activity, including creating 500 jobs, an estimated £10.2m annual spend and floorspace of 19,500. It will also provide a new night time economy in the area. The scheme is programmed to start in 2018 and complete in 2026.
- Bethnal Green Road: Work is underway to improve signage in the area to Petticoat Lane and Columbia Road. A pilot programme of new pop-up uniform rigs is being tried out and new pitch markings are under development. A history and market information board is to be provided in the area.

1.7 The Thriving High Streets work, which is being funded through the New Homes Bonus (NHB), is now progressing well to catch up on the delays in the GLA finalising the grant agreement. While the funding for the project was agreed in 2014, the final agreement for signature was not received by the Council until 13th June 2016. The agreement, which sets out all the financial indicators and outputs expected for the grant is now with the Council's legal team for processing. The delay had impacted on the delivery with the risk attached to commencing ahead of the funding agreement being finalised. However, good progress is now being made on progressing the Town Centre Strategy, with consultants currently being procured to undertake this work.

1.5 Reflecting the important nature of this work for the borough, activities supporting town centre, high street and market regeneration have been reflected as an activity in the new Strategic Plan 2016/17-2018/19: Develop and deliver a High Streets and Town Centres Strategy by March 2017. The milestones for this activity are:

- Develop a new five year markets strategy (May 2016)
- Develop the Whitechapel Town Centre Retail Vision (July 2016)
- Assess retail viability as part of the Local Plan evidence base gathering (July 2016)

- Develop proposals for shop front improvement model of delivery (September 2016)
- Proposal for choice of pilot Town Centre(s) project (September 2016)
- Implement Town Centre toolkits to include:
 - Town Centre indicator list
 - Communications and profiles
 - Generation of Town Centre Partnerships (March 2017).

2. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 2.1 On 1st December 2015, Cabinet approved an action plan for projects to support the delivery of successful town centres. This report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee details the progress that has been made against each of the individual action points that were adopted.
- 2.2 The report outlines that elements of the programme have been delayed while the Council and GLA finalised the grant agreement relating to the 'Thriving High Streets' project which is being funded through 'top-sliced' New Homes Bonus resources (paragraph 1.6). The Council did not wish to put itself at risk by commencing the projects before the full grant arrangements were put in place, but now that these have been agreed the project will be managed in accordance with the grant conditions to ensure that the funding entitlement is maximised.
- 2.3 Many of the action points relate to initial activities that are being undertaken within existing staffing and financial resources. It is likely that when completed, these will result in a range of further activities and priorities for the Council and key partners that will provide a focus for ensuring that available resources are targeted to and in line with these needs. Delivery of these activities will be extremely challenging in the current economic climate, and will require a co-ordinated approach and the alignment of funding from all major partners.

3. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 3.1 The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the Committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions.
- 3.2 The recommendations in the report appear capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. It will be for officers to ensure this is the case and to take legal advice as necessary.

- 3.3 The Council's Local Plan (Core Strategy 2010), includes a number of strategic objectives in relation to town centres and provides the planning context for the Report. The Council's Local Plan is in turn set in the context of the London policy framework, and the Report refers to the report of the London Councils issued in 2013, entitled 'London Councils Streets Ahead'. The Council's Managing Development Document (2013) forms part of the Local Plan and provides more detailed policies to guide development in town centres. A review of the Local Plan has begun in 2015 and offers an opportunity to consider how the Council's planning policies can protect and support high streets and town centres.
- 3.4 The Council is a best value authority within the meaning of section 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. As such the Council is required under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (the best value duty). In accordance with the Council's best value arrangements, consideration will need to be given to whether the Committee's recommendations can be delivered within budget and whether they represent value for money.
- 3.5 In its consideration of the report and its recommendations, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). A proportionate level of equality analysis will be required if the Council pursues the Committee's recommendations.
- 3.6 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

4. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 It is widely recognised that town centres, high streets and markets are vital in supporting opportunities in employment, social capital and economic growth in the area. However, there are many challenges facing town centres including changes in the way people shop, changes in the population demographic, strategic competition and national legislation to name but a few.
- 4.2 The population demographic of people who live and work in the Borough has changed over recent years, becoming more ethnically diverse with more households with an income of above £60,000. Therefore evolving the offer and encouraging new businesses which can capitalise on the needs of new consumers is an essential part of ensuring town centres can thrive.

5. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The recommendations in the original report were made as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's role in helping to secure continuous improvement for the council, as required under its Best Value duty. This report reviews the success of their implementation.

6. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the report or recommendations.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the report or recommendations.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no direct implications of crime and disorder as a result of the recommendations of this review.

9. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no direct implications of safeguarding as a result of the recommendations in this review.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Scrutiny Review Report: Supporting the delivery of successful town centres (high streets and markets)

Appendix 2 – Action Plan

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

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A