

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2017

**ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Dave Chesterton (Chair)	
Councillor Clare Harrisson(Vice-Chair)	Scrutiny Lead for Scrutiny Lead for Health, Adults & Community
Councillor Danny Hassell	Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim	
Councillor Rabina Khan	
Councillor Ayas Miah	Scrutiny Lead for Governance
Councillor Helal Uddin	Scrutiny Lead for Place
Councillor Andrew Wood	Scrutiny Lead for Resources

Co-opted Members Present:

Shabbir Chowdhury	Parent Governors
Joanna Hannan	Representative of Diocese of Westminster
Fatiha Kassouri	Parent Governors
Dr Phillip Rice	Church of England Representative
Christine Trumper	Parent Governors

Other Councillors Present:

Mayor John Biggs

Apologies:

Councillor Oliur Rahman	
Asad M Jaman	Muslim Faith Community

Officers Present:

Ann Corbett	(Divisional Director, Community Safety)
Elizabeth Bailey	Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
Sharon Godman	(Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Partnerships)
Janet Fasan	(Divisional Director, Legal)

Denise Radley

(Corporate Director, Health, Adults &
Community)

Will Tuckley
Sue Williams

(Chief Executive)
Borough Commander - Chief
Superintendent

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Oliur Rahman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

Councillor Woods indicated that if there was to be any detailed discussion during **Item 10** "Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Unrestricted Cabinet Papers" the "Neighbourhood Planning: Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Plan" he would need to declare a personal interest as he had been involved in drafting much of the supporting documentation.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED

To defer consideration of the minutes of the last meeting to the next ordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 24th January, 2018.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

**5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG
2017/18**

Noted

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

7.1 Community Safety

The Committee received a presentation that covered the following:

- I. Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG);
- II. Hate Crime;
- III. Rapid Response Team;

- IV. Prevent & Community Safety Partnership;
- V. Enforcement;
- VI. Crime Prevention;
- VII. Anti-Social Behaviour;
- VIII. Drugs & Alcohol – Criminal Justice;
- IX. Licensing Policy & Strategy;
- X. Trading Standards; and
- XI. Community Cohesion.

The questions and comments from Members on the presentation may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Indicated their concerns that vulnerable young people are being exploited in order to facilitate the running of street level drug dealing within the Borough. In response it was noted that work is being undertaken with Hackney and Newham to address this issue;
- Noted that the primary purpose of stop and a search power is to enable officers to allay or confirm suspicions about individuals. However, it needs to be used in a respectful way;
- Noted that there is a North East London Domestic Abuse Forum that aims to bring together representatives from the many local agencies who work with those affected by domestic violence and abuse in North East London. The Forum shares good practice, increases awareness of domestic violence and identifies any gaps in services;
- Noted that with the use by the Police of body cameras together with other ways to gather evidence the Partnership can pursue prosecutions in Domestic Violence (DV) cases without reliance on any witnesses;
- Noted that LBTH had commissioned an independent DV investigator;
- Noted that work is being undertaken on a strategic action plan to address gang and knife crime (e.g. weapons sweeps and the education of young people about crime);
- Noted Deputy Mayor for London now has a Knife Crime Working Group and that as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy there is a bid for the funding on work for young people and violence;
- Noted that with regard to the Council funded police officers a targeted operational model has been developed;
- Noted that the Police and Health Services are working together in the Accident and Emergency Trauma Units regarding young people and crime;
- Noted the concerns within the Borough regarding the effectiveness of the 101 number and need to improve the increased reporting of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB);
- Commented that it would wish to know how reporting of ASB this being developed and managed within Tower Hamlets;
- Noted that whilst calls to 999 will take priority over those to 101 in terms of back office support there is a recruitment campaign and work is being done to develop reporting on line and through social media;

- Noted if any Safer Neighbourhood Team has not contacted the local Ward Councillors then the Borough Commander needs to be advised;
- Noted that OWL ([Online Watch Link](#)) is used by the Metropolitan Police Service and Tower Hamlets in partnership with local Neighbourhood Watch coordinators to communicate with residents and businesses across the Boroughs. OWL is an advanced solution for police & communities to grow and manage Neighbourhood Watch, School Watch, Business Watch and dozens of other schemes. OWL provides watch members with the latest messages and local crime alerts sent by email, telephone, SMS or fax;
- Noted that from January 2017 to September 2017, residents had been invited to attend a community safety ward walkabout and roadshow in their local area, targeting ASB/crime hotspot areas in each ward. Residents were able to raise their concerns directly with the Police, Council and Community Safety Partners, and also discuss possible actions to reduce these issues. The walkabouts had been led by the local Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Asma Begum. The Police Borough Commander and/or Chief Inspector of Neighbourhoods had also invited Ward Councillors, Ward Panel Members, Housing Providers, Youth Workers, Drug Outreach Workers, Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) and the Rapid Response Team Workers;
- Noted that Cabinet Member for Community Safety was looking into a hot line for reporting of ASB and the Borough Command are working on developing and maintaining dedicated ward officers;
- Noted that eventually there will be 25 dedicated officers in the Borough in addition to the 14 officers dedicated to Tower Hamlets Homes estates;
- Noted that addressing ASB is challenging and needs to be tackled through a partnership approach in terms of resources deployed by the statutory agencies and that people can feel confident in report incidents;
- Noted that on Halloween and Fire Works Night the numbers of ASB calls had gone down;
- Noted as part of the late night levy there was a business consultation and work on helping people exiting lives as sex workers and those who comment violence against women;
- Noted that the Borough Command is working in local schools and the Youth Independent Advisory Group to develop a positive dialogue;
- Noted that there had been much work on counter terrorism across the partnership to take preventative measures;
- Noted that the partnership had developed a knife crime action plan as part of a focused piece of work so as to build a strategy;
- Commented that there was a need to actively involve the voice of the victims of crimes and they should be valued and respected. In response it was noted that the development of the action plan involved a wide number of groups but need to do more focused around families especially with regard to the victim's voice.

In conclusion, the Chair Moved and it was **RESOLVED** that the Committee:

1. Welcomed the presentation; and
2. Placed on record its congratulation to Sue Williams the Police Borough Commander had received a Queens Policing Medal for hostage negotiations.

8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Promoting a shared responsibility and removing barriers to improved recycling in the borough Scrutiny Challenge Report

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED to defer formal consideration of this report to the meeting of the next ordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 24th January, 2018.

8.2 Mayor's Transparency Protocol & OSC Transparency Recommendations

The Committee received and noted a report that provided an update on the progress made in implementing the actions set out in the Mayor's Transparency Protocol and the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Transparency Commission report. It was noted that as the work around these two initiatives had naturally converged and the report provided a combined picture of the current position on the Council's overall work to drive forward the vision of a more open, accountable and transparent organisation.

It was also noted that whilst transparency and accountability remain a matter of real interest and concern to local people, the Annual Residents Survey (ARS) 2017/18 results had shown that 79% of residents trust the Council 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' - up 7 points on last year, and well above the trust rating for councils nationally (59%). 59% also had agreed that the Council is 'open and transparent about its activities' - up 7 points on last year. 72% are satisfied with the way the Council runs things - close to last year's rating and a historical high – and 78% felt the Council was doing a good job - up 6 points over the year. Despite this, the Council recognised that there is still further work to do, and remains committed to becoming a more open and transparent organisation.

The questions and comments from Members on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Commented that the available information on the web site needs to be fit for purpose and noted it was recognised that there is work to do on how the website can be navigated;

- Noted that regarding the Council welcomes petitions and recognises that they are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. The Council also accepts both paper and e-Petitions. Paper petitions are those prepared in the traditional way: a petition organiser creates a paper document that includes a proposed action;
- Noted regarding **e-Petitions** these are created, signed, and submitted entirely online. The petition organiser uses the Council's website to create their petition and residents can then electronically add their name via the website to show their support of the action the petition organiser proposes;
- Commented that the petition process should be a symbol of an active community (**i.e.** a way of expressing an opinion for the public to put forward a view on an issue); and
- Commented that it wished to know about the use of alternate means to raise issues and including regular publications both digital and non-digital methods. Accordingly it was agreed that Andreas Christophorou; Divisional Director of Communications and Marketing should be invited to attend a future meeting to explain the Council's Communications Strategy.

In conclusion, the Chair Moved and it was **RESOLVED** that the Committee would welcome the report and looked forward to receiving a presentation at a future meeting on the Council's Communications Strategy.

9. **VERBAL UPDATES FROM THE CHAIR AND SCRUTINY LEADS**

The Committee received and noted the updates from the Scrutiny Leads which may be summarised as follows:

Councillor Clare Harrisson (Scrutiny Lead for Health, Adults & Community)

- Noted in January that there would be an update on the recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee's Review on Maternity Services which was undertaken in 2016.

Councillor Danny Hassell (Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services)

- Noted that there would be a Challenge Session on New Year Gangs and Serious Violence early in 2018.

Councillor Helal Uddin (Scrutiny Lead for Place)

- Noted that there would be a Fire Safety Review Session Presentation early in 2018 and at the January Sub-Committee a report following up from the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Homelessness.

Councillor Andrew Wood (Scrutiny Lead for Resources)

- Noted that at the last meeting the Sub-Committee had considered a number of reports including Event Fund Report for Applications Received Quarters 1 – 3, 2017-18; Affordable Housing Grant Programme 2016-19 Second Round and Mental Health User Led Grants Programme 2018 – 2020.

Councillor Dave Chesterton (Chair – Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

- Key Decision Notice – London Wide Pilot for Business Rates Retention: It was noted that as part of the report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy report to Cabinet on 19 September, the Mayor agreed in principle to join the London Business Rates Retention Scheme Pilot. Following conversations with London Councils it is now apparent that the final formal decision will need to be taken one Cabinet meeting earlier than expected (it will now be presented for final decision on 9 January). Although a general forward plan notice has been published for the Medium Term Financial Strategy Report that will contain this decision, as the decision is being taken separately to the rest of the report (which is only approved in draft form on 9 January) officers have decided that it is prudent and an aide to transparency, to publish a separate forward plan notice to highlight this specific decision. However, as the decision will now need to take place within 28 days, the notice will be published under general urgency provisions. Accordingly, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny will monitor the progress of this report.

10. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The Committee noted that due to a Power Outage at John Onslow House reprographics officers which had meant it had not been possible to send out the Cabinet papers as intended.

Accordingly, copies of the agenda for Cabinet meeting were available at tonight's meeting and that comments on the Cabinet agenda could be submitted up until 10:00 a.m. Friday 15th December, 2017 for submission to Cabinet on the 19th December, 2017.

Finally, the Committee was reminded that the Cabinet agenda was available online for inspection [here](#)

11. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

11.1 ALPHA SQUARE

The Committee noted that Councillor Chesterton as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny had asked Mayor John Biggs to attend tonight's meeting tonight to

make a statement in relation to the recent reports in the press regarding Alpha Square, in particular the Times and the East London Advertiser.

In addition, it was noted that the Chair had sought and received the following advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

- The case was referred to the Serious Fraud Office following advice from a Leading QC. The Leading QC also gave the Council advice about how it should handle the case.
- The Serious Fraud Office referred the matter to the National Crime Agency. The allegations made are of a serious nature and the Council must be mindful that this is still subject to a decision from the National Crime Agency and possible criminal prosecution.
- The Monitoring Officer had been in contact with the National Crime Agency and has been advised that it would be inappropriate for the Agency to comment at this stage of the matter.

The Committee noted therefore that it needed to be extremely cautious about any discussions on this issue i.e. No questions about individuals or speculation on the allegations.

Accordingly, the Committee noted that once the Mayor had made his statement there will then be an opportunity for questions. Although, given the advice of the Monitoring Officer the Committee was advised if the Chair was of the view that questions or statements go beyond the limitations of the advice received, he would intervene.

The questions and comments from Members on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the Mayor had a limited role in planning process as an Executive Mayor and the Councillors who sit and determine the planning decisions operated under very clear guidance;
- Noted that the Commissioners were advised of the case as part of their regular briefing on Council Business and they had noted that it was not within their remit;
- Noted that this is a series of allegations and it is unclear if there is any firm evidence;
- Noted that this is part of the Council's efforts to develop confidence in people to lodge a complaint;
- Noted that any allegations need to be carefully investigated; and
- Noted that the Council has a comprehensive complaints system and the Local Government Ombudsman can order redress if there has been maladministration.

In conclusion, the Chair Moved and it was **RESOLVED** that the Committee would note the statement from the Mayor John Biggs.

12. SUMMARY NOTES FROM BREXIT CHALLENGE SESSION

The Committee noted that Councillor Ayas Miah (Scrutiny Lead Member for Governance) had led a Scrutiny Challenge Session on Thursday 7th December 2017 to look at the impact that Brexit could have on Tower Hamlets Council on. With particular reference to:

1. What impact could Brexit have on Tower Hamlets as a Local Authority particularly in relation our legal powers and responsibilities?
2. What are the likely challenges and opportunities of Brexit to our workforce, funding for core services and impact this may have on our local residents and regeneration schemes?
3. How could the Council ensure that we develop a comprehensive and proactive plan and approach to mitigating the impact of Brexit?
4. In preparing the Council for Brexit what should be our priority areas of contingency planning and how do we ensure that this is effectively communicated to all our internal and external stakeholders?

The questions and comments from the Scrutiny Challenge Session may be summarised as follows:

- There is a lot of uncertainty nationally and it is still not clear what kind of Brexit we will be facing. Until the Council has the full and final agreed Brexit arrangements in place, it will be difficult to determine the exact local impact;
- This is just the start of the Council's deliberations about the impact of Brexit. For example, the Challenge Session was not able to discuss the impact of Brexit on Tower Hamlets as a place, such as economic stability and what impact this may have on the Borough's attractiveness and competitiveness as a business destination and on communities that call Tower Hamlets home;
- Whilst these broader issues are already being considered by the Tower Hamlets Strategic Partnership, going forward it was felt that there will need to be further sessions for more detailed and specific discussions, bringing together a wider range of stakeholders; and
- The Council needs to be fully prepared for all eventualities (including a "no deal Brexit") and constantly keep abreast of all key Brexit developments, by identifying and reviewing areas of potential impact. This will allow it to increase resilience and develop high level contingency plans that protect the Council's revenue streams, workforce, local regeneration, infrastructure projects and community cohesion priorities.

In conclusion, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Welcomed the update and looked forward to receiving more detailed and specific updates at future meetings; and
2. Agree to the proposal of Councillor Chesterton for a Cross Party Group on Brexit to be convened after the Local Government Elections in May. Although by March there should be a clear programme of activities dates times and speakers for this Group.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As agenda circulated contained no exempt/confidential business that required there to be a formal discussion and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public.

14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

16. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS

Nil items

17. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items

The meeting ended at 9.10 p.m.

**Chair, Councillor Dave Chesterton
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**