

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2019

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

Members Present:

Councillor James King (Chair)	
Councillor Sufia Alam (Vice-Chair)	– Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
Councillor Dipa Das	– Scrutiny Lead for Housing & Regeneration
Councillor Bex White	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment
Councillor Peter Golds	– Councillor John Pierce

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Candida Ronald	– (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector)
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Apologies:

Mayor John Biggs	– Tower Hamlets
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	– Scrutiny Lead for Health & Adults
Councillor Marc Francis	–
Councillor Tarik Khan	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance
Councillor Eve McQuillan	– Bethnal Green Ward
Councillor Andrew Wood	

Officers Present:

Kevin Bartle	– Divisional Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit
David Freeman	– (Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy Manager)
Sharon Godman	– (Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance)
Juanita Haynes	– (Senior Research Officer, Strategy & Performance)
Daniel Kerr	– (Strategy and Policy Manager)
Ruth Dowden	– (Complaints & Information Manager, Legal Services, Law Probity & Governance)

Will Tuckley
David Knight

– (Chief Executive)
– (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

The following Councillors declared an interest that must be registered in Agenda Item 5.5

- Councillor Bex. White;
- Councillor James. King;
- Councillor Peter Golds; and
- Councillor Dipa Das.

2. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on June 24th 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

2.1 Monday, 29th July, 2019

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29th July, 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

2.2 Wednesday, 14th August, 2019

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th August, 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

3. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

4. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

Noted

5. UNRESTRICTED MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Complaints - Presentation

The Committee received a presentation on the complaints procedure and the Committee:

- Noted that the complaints procedure is intended to be a systematic method used by the Council for (i) receiving, (ii) recording and (iii) responding to ensure that complaints are responded to efficiently and effectively and learnt from;
- Commented that it would have been helpful to have had the Local Government Ombudsmen (LGO) letter to the Council giving the feedback from the complaints made to them, and comment on the Council's performance in responding to investigations. In response it was noted that whilst the LGO used to provide detailed responses in this case it was a standard letter high lighting very few issues. However, it was noted going forward the LGO letter would be included in reports to committees;
- Was pleased to note that the Council is working constructively to remedy injustices and take on board how to prevent further people being affected by issues highlighted in any investigations;
- Agreed that it was important to also learn from other authorities to encourage service improvement;
- Wanted to see if possible a demographic profile on the complaints received;
- Noted that it was important to have a culture of learning from complaints with a constant exchange between providers and users;
- Noted that the Council tracks outcomes to ensure a consistency in addressing issues raised;
- Noted that the Council takes very seriously any recommendations received from the LGO to put things right;
- Noted that the Council has improved and puts great effort to ensure to right processes are in place so as to ensure that there is sustained improvement. This approach is as a result of (i) A focus on services with high escalation rates and high rates of upheld complaints – workshops, 1:1 sessions, service meetings; (ii) Style of letter writing – introducing plain English; (iii) Ensuring senior managers, Heads of Service and Divisional Directors review and sign-off; and
- Wanted to look at this issue again once the Committee had received the Annual Report and to develop relevant themes into the Work Programme.

As a result of discussions on the report the Committee **RESOLVED** that it wanted to:

- Consider this issue again once the Committee had received the Annual Report (i) to develop relevant themes into the Work Programme; and (ii). If possible receive a demographic profile on the complaints received.

5.2 Annual Residents Survey - Presentation

The Committee received and noted a report on the Annual Residents Survey which explored residents' views about the Council, services and the local area. The main points of the discussion may be summarised as follows:

The Committee noted that:

- The fieldwork/interviews are carried out by sub-contractor 'Infocorp' who are experts in their field and is designed to collect data on resident perceptions about the council, local services and the area;
- Infocorp have vast experience at interviewing in London boroughs and account for language barrier issues and the difficulties of interviewing in tower blocks;
- All interviewers have relevant interview experience and accreditation (they are required to have completed two days training with the IQCS (Interview Quality Control Scheme));
- The questions are closely tied to service priorities and form a core component of the Council's performance monitoring. They are also designed to provide context for policy development, service delivery and review;
- The latest annual survey took place during March to June 2019. The survey captured the views of 1,104 Tower Hamlets residents in face to face interviews;
- Noted that in relation to crime there is a continuing concern regarding crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), which is not a surprise given picture nationally. As to what can be done is quite a complex issue in (i) tackling crime; (ii) providing reassurance; and (iii) local engagement in the solutions to the issues that affect communities;
- Noted whilst the Council is proud of the service provided by the Idea Stores there has been a decline in use which reflects that seen across the Country over the last 15 years. This strengthens the case for rapid modernisation of Stores across the Borough by improving digital services and the availability of eBooks, and investing in books, buildings and good design;
- Noted that the Council will be looking to undertake more regular reviews in terms of service delivery;
- Noted that the interviewers randomly go to every 4/5 households; and
- Indicated that it would have wished to see the Survey results in full **e.g.** to see what is happening in the Ward/Neighbourhoods clusters in more depth.

As a result of discussions on the report the Committee **RESOLVED** that it wanted to:

- Receive a more detailed report that set out the Survey results in full.

5.3 Strategic Plan Performance & Delivery Reporting: Quarter 1 of 2019/20

Item deferred

5.4 Budget Monitoring - Presentation

The Committee received and noted a report that introduces the budget monitoring report for Quarter 1. It included details about General Fund revenue, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and progress made against savings targets. It also included capital approval requests to adopt new schemes into the Council's approved capital programme and to change existing capital schemes. The main points of the discussion may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the Council is now at a more difficult time to manage the budget with the General Fund projecting a forecast overspend of £8.2m after the application of reserves and corporate contingency;
- Noted that the Council's Directorates are therefore developing recovery plans to reduce this overspend and therefore reduce the requirement on General Fund reserves funding;
- Noted that it is important that issues are addressed to remain within the approved budget provision or where they cannot be contained by individual service management action, alternative proposals are developed and solutions proposed which address the financial impact;
- Noted that with regard to addressing the current budgetary issues and deliver improved services managers need to be held much more to account than before especially against raising demand through extra pressures so need to be robust in saying that the savings have got to be made;
- Indicated that it wanted to receive regular updates on progress **e.g.** having regular oversight on those slippages in savings;
- Felt that all budget holders need to take responsibility for their budgets need to be more robust in delivering (i) savings; and (ii) recovery plans;
- With regards to the Council's capital programme noted that there is a clear plan of action to deliver these programmes;
- Was advised that with regards to the use of any surplus income from parking enforcement activity. The aim was to promote increased parking compliance throughout the Borough although there is nothing wrong with making a surplus long as the authority does not rely on it;
- Wished to receive a report/presentation on how the Council can use any surplus income from parking enforcement activity; and

- Wanted to see more on what is being done in terms of management of the budget and a fuller narrative on the items in such reports.

As a result of discussions on the report the Committee **RESOLVED** that it wanted to:

- Receive a presentation on how the Council can use surplus income from parking enforcement activity; and
- See more on what is being done in terms of management of the budget with a fuller narrative on the items in such reports.

5.5 Local Community Fund Transition Arrangements

The Committee received and noted a report that provided an update of the Local Community Fund Transition Arrangements. The main points of the discussion may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that public services are constantly seeking ways of ensuring services reach those who are most vulnerable and 'unreached' in society;
- Was informed that the Council's principal objective in developing a new corporate grants programme is to harness the distinctive characteristics of grants to promote sustainable and resilient communities and help enable the voluntary and community sector (VCS) continue to make its unique contribution towards achieving the outcomes for the community set out in the Tower Hamlets Plan;
- Commented that it wanted to see a breakdown of the funding to address the mitigation. In response it was noted that there would be a report to Cabinet that would provide such deal. Including looking at costing the proposals fully and the targeted commissioning;
- Wished to know what is being done regarding capacity building and helping organisations to access alternative funding streams and how much extra money can be brought in. In response it was noted that (i) Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services (THCVS) is currently working on this; and
- Noted that Spacehive is a trusted place for collaboration, bringing together communities, residents, businesses, councils, and grant bodies. Through the grant maker app Spacehive are able to automatically match projects to Funds, which can then pledge directly to the crowdfunding campaign

As a result of discussions on the report the Committee **RESOLVED** that it wanted to revisit this topic at the next meeting.

6. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The noted that there were no questions to be presented at Cabinet by the Chair in relation to unrestricted business on the agenda.

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Councillor Bex White Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment

Noted (i) that Councillor White had been continuing her regular meetings with the Cabinet Members and Chief Officers relevant to her portfolio; (ii) on 25th September, 2019 she would be undertaking a visit to the reuse and recycling centre (RRC); (iii) there would be a Scrutiny Challenge Session on resident engagement with safer neighbourhood panels on Wednesday, 23rd October, 2019 11.00 a.m.; (iv) attended the Mayors Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Board which had considered how to reduce silos within the Council and share intelligence between the various enforcement officers within Tower Hamlets.

Councillor Sufia Alam Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education

Noted that (i) on 8th October, 2019 Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee will be taking a “deep dive” into special educational needs and disability (SEND) to look at the improvement journey that the service is undertaking in preparation for an upcoming inspection; (ii) Has had meetings with the Lead Member to discuss what areas she intends to focus on in her challenge sessions; (iii) Following the Full Council Motion regarding the SEND funding crisis the Mayor had written to the Secretary of State for Education urging him to invest further to bring an end to the SEND funding crisis.

Councillor James King Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Noted that (i) The Chair had attended the Transformation and Improvement Board which had considered (a) the strategic approach being taken to coordinate and deliver regeneration across the Borough; and (b) considered the significant transformation and improvement activity currently undertaken in the Council; (ii) The Chair had a meeting with Sharon Godman - Director of strategy, policy and performance; (iii) The Chair had attended a budget briefing with Councillor Tarik Khan Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance, Councillor Eve McQuillan and Councillor Sufia Alam (Vice-Chair) Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education; and (iv) The Chair would be arranging a spotlight session on Place Based Decisions.

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

Noted that Council is looking to appoint two members of the public to serve as co-opted members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Interviews will be held on week commencing 14 October 2019.

9. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As the agenda circulated contained no exempt/confidential business and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

10. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items

11. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

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

Nil items

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

Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.25 p.m.

**Chair, Councillor James King
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**