

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2019**

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

**Members Present:**

Councillor Sufia Alam (In-the-Chair)	– Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury	– Scrutiny Lead for Health & Adults
Councillor Dipa Das	– Scrutiny Lead for Housing & Regeneration
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Tarik Khan	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance
Councillor Eve McQuillan	– Bethnal Green Ward
Councillor Bex White	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment
Councillor Andrew Wood	

**Co-opted Members Present:**

James Wilson	– Co-opted Member
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**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Sabina Akhtar	– Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit
Councillor Sirajul Islam	– Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing

**Apologies:**

Councillor James King	– Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Halima Islam	– Co-opted Member

**Officers Present:**

Kevin Bartle	– Interim Divisional Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit
Tim Clee	– Partnership & Participation Manager
Thorsten Dreyer	– Head of Intelligence and Performance
Afazul Hoque	– Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy
Daniel Kerr	– Strategy and Policy Manager
Judith St John	– Divisional Director, Sports, Leisure

Michael Rourke

and Culture  
– Divisional Director Property and  
Major Programmes

## 1. PRE- ELECTION PURDAH

The noted that as there is a General Election on the 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 the following Pre-Election Purdah rules are in force.

During this meeting Members of the Committee must refrain from any of the following:

- Endorsing or referencing any candidate standing in the election;
- Endorsing or highlighting any political party standing in the election; and
- Endorsing or publicising any campaign or controversial issue which is linked to a candidate or political party at the election.

Members were advised to stick to factual comment when discussing any significant or controversial issues or campaigns.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting.

## 3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

### **RESOLVED**

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

## 4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

## 5. RECRUITMENT OF TWO (2) INDEPENDENT CO-OPTED REPRESENTATIVES TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that an advert, promoting the two (2) positions, had been placed on the Council's website and the positions had also been advertised through social media. The interviews had been undertaken by an interview panel including Councillor James King, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and officers. As a result of the interviews the following two (2) candidates were selected James Wilson and Halima Islam to

serve as Co-Opted Members on the Committee for the period of the current administration.

It was noted that training would be provided by officers to the co-opted representatives on the Code of Conduct for Members which will include declarations of interest, exempt reports and data protection. An induction session will also be held to explain their role and how this can be developed.

Accordingly, The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

The Committee agreed the appointment of James Wilson and Halima Islam to serve as Co-Opted Members on the Committee for the period of the current administration.

## **6. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

Noted

## **7. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items

## **8. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

### **8.1 Leisure Facilities**

It was really pleasing to hear about the work which has been delivered to improve the provision of leisure facilities.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sabina Akhtar (Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit); Judith St John (Divisional Director Sports Leisure and Culture); Tim Clee (Partnership and Participation Manager) for attending tonight's Overview and Scrutiny meeting to provide an overview of leisure facilities in the Borough. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Had a robust discussion about the shifting landscape of leisure provision in the Borough and raised concerns about the affordability of provision for low income families, the accessibility for women, and customer experience;
- The Committee also questioned how we are measuring improved health outcomes;
- Were encouraged by the range of women only programmes delivered and were particularly pleased to hear that there are plans to open a women's only gym at Poplar Baths;

- Were also pleased to hear that further outdoor gyms will be opening however wanted to see more support and guidance in place to encourage more people to use them to maximise the public health benefit;
- Recommended that there should be a requirement in the new contract to 'staff' outdoor gyms;
- Wanted to see evidence in regard how Public Health and Social Value would reach out to those areas in greatest need;
- Noted that whilst the Astro Turf Pitches that are available to hire across the Borough are run by different providers but they are cheaper than our neighbours or London Wide;
- Noted that the schools estate in Tower Hamlets has a range of educational, recreational and sporting facilities that can be made available for use by members of the wider community when not otherwise required for education purposes;
- Welcomed the development of stronger links between schools and the communities they serve;
- Noted that the leisure centre market has changed with the focuses now on both the higher end and the smaller budget gyms. Therefore, there is a need to look at how LBTH addresses the market; how Council facilities can stand out and encourage people to see them as a place to go;
- Were informed that as to the customer experience of the LBTH centres whilst many have achieved the customer excellence awards it is important to maintain these standards;
- Felt that given the age/quality of existing building stock there is an urgent need to look at how to obtain funding for repairs and maintenance; and
- Asked for bench marking data on users/per centre including a breakdown by post code e.g. (i) the use of the use of Open Air Gyms; (ii) community use of school facilities; and (iii) a breakdown of number of staff who are local residents.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked Councillor Akhtar for the presentation and looked forward to receiving the bench marking data.

## **9. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **9.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Budget Planning**

The Chair thanked Councillor Candida Ronald (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector) and Kevin Bartle (Interim Divisional Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit) for attending tonight's Overview and Scrutiny meeting to provide an update on the Council's finances as Members reviewed the Medium Term Financial Strategy report. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Expressed concern by the sizable savings that the Council now needs to achieve and indicated that it would want to see (i) a more robust approach to developing saving proposals; and (ii) regular updates on the delivery of savings
- Noted that some savings have not been as robustly developed as they should have been;
- Felt that where the Council has committed to delivering savings that more work needs to be undertaken on (i) validation and (ii) time frames;
- Considered ways in which the Council can achieve the saving targets (**e.g.** recovery plans; an agency staffing panel and a review of all non-essential expenditure;
- Noted that it has an important role to play to ensure that targets are met by (i) continuing to question officers about the savings members have agreed; and (ii) maintaining an oversight of the Councils recovery plans;
- Expressed concerns regarding the timing of the budget consultation process and indicated that it would like this to start earlier to allow for better engagement with residents and the scrutiny process;
- Was pleased to hear that this is something which is currently being considered;
- Noted that some savings cannot now be delivered as they are factually inaccurate and new savings are now required;
- Noted that there is a consistent review of demographic growth to ensure that it reflects the actual situation (**e.g.** Impact on the increases in receipts from Council Tax);
- Felt it was important to have properly defined longer term savings than before.

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

## **RESOLVED**

- Placed on record its concerns regarding the timing of the budget consultation process and indicated that it would like this to start earlier to allow for better engagement with residents and the scrutiny process.

## **9.2 Quarterly Budget Monitoring**

Committee received and noted a presentation from Councillor Candida Ronald (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector) and Kevin Bartle (Interim Divisional Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit) on Quarterly Budget Monitoring. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

### The Committee

- Agreed that there is a need to be more robust monitoring process;
- Noted that budgetary pressures had been identified and that plans are in place to address them;
- Noted that the Council's Internal Audit is undertaking a review of the process;
- Confirmed its view that savings must be both robust and feasible if they are to be delivered;
- Expressed the view that consideration could be given to introducing a "bottom-up" budget process with individual directorates assigning total budgets to each service area. Which would boost accuracy and accountability as this process would involve all the individuals in each department; and
- Agreed that all the individuals in each department need to examine (i) how budgets can best serve each service area; and (ii) how to adjust budgets.

### 9.3 Strategic Performance Monitoring: Quarterly Performance Report

The Chair thanked Councillor Sirajul Islam (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing) and Thorsten Dreyer (Head of Intelligence & Performance) for attending tonight's Overview and Scrutiny meeting to present an update on the pace, delivery, performance of the Council's Strategic Plan. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

#### The Committee:

- Noted that Council's Performance and Accountability Framework outlined the process for monitoring the Strategic Plan to improve outcomes for residents;
- Noted that regular monitoring is being undertaken to enable Members and Directorates to keep process under review e.g. which indicators to keep and which to replace;
- Noted that (i) at the end of quarter 2 2019/20 all 73 strategic plan activities are expected to be delivered by the end of the year; (ii) 17 performance indicators have been met or are exceeding their target; (iii) 9 are between the target and the minimum expectation; (iv) 8 are falling short; and (v) 24 indicators are data only measures or do not have an expected data return in quarter 2 2019/20;
- Was keen to get detailed feedback on (i) those "delayed discharges" from hospital attributable to the Councils social care service; and (ii) the inequality measures in regards to WorkPath and Homelessness;
- Was informed that the NEETS indicator is being revised to bring it into line with national indicators which look at the specific age range of 16-17;
- Noted that work is undertaken with the directorates on the format/content of the documentation;

- Agreed that the pace, delivery, performance of the Council would continue to be an item for consideration at the regular spotlight sessions with Lead Members and the Corporate Directors; and
- Agreed to continue with the regular monitoring of the Strategic Plan.

## 10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

### **Councillor Sufia Alam Scrutiny Lead for Children and Education**

The Scrutiny lead informed the Committee that:

- Going forward the Sub-Committee would be looking at (i) Youth Provision – “The young experience”; and (ii) Children Social Care;
- The she had, had meetings with the relevant Divisional Directors;
- She had heard from Parents of the SEND Ambassadors group who relayed their experience of the services; and
- There was to be a review in regard to Secondary School exclusions.

### **Councillor Kahar Chowdhury - Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults**

- Noted that at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November the Sub-Committee had considered (i) Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2018-19; (ii) Review of Homelessness Action Plan; (iii) Consolidating Dementia and Challenging Behaviour Inpatient Wards; and (iv) had a discussion relating to proposed changes to welfare meals.

### **Councillor Tarik Khan - Scrutiny Lead for Resources & Finance**

- Noted the Lead Member was in regular discussions with Neville Murton - Corporate Director of Resources and Kevin Bartle – Interim Divisional Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit.

### **Councillor Bex White - Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment**

Noted:

#### **Community Safety**

- The Scrutiny Lead (i) Had received the draft of Spotlight report today (25<sup>th</sup> November, 2019) and will review that later this week; (ii) Had, had review meetings with the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, and also with the Divisional Director to be apprised of developments in this area, specifically the two restructures that have taken place; (iii) Was planning for the new Borough Commander’s attendance at next month’s Overview and Scrutiny meeting; and (iv) Had had a meeting with the Corporate Director to review progress against this year’s budget and the development of the budget for next year.

## Environment

- The Scrutiny Lead (i) Had, had a meeting with Corporate Director for Place to review this year's financial performance, and to look at next year's budget; (ii) Awaiting a full list of what parking income can be spent on, given that this continues to come in higher than budgeted; and (iii) Had a meeting with the Portfolio Lead Member for Environment on fees and charges for the upcoming financial year.

## 11. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The Committee received and noted those questions to be presented at Cabinet by the Chair in relation to unrestricted business on the agenda attached as appendices to these minutes. The main points of the discussion may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Expressed its concern over the changes to the provision of 'meals on wheels'. This item had originally been presented at the Health Scrutiny meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 and the Committee raised a number of concerns. Principally, that that this is a key decision which should be taken by the Mayor in Cabinet before progressing any further;
- Indicated that it would like to ask the Mayor to agree to take this as a key decision so that it can be made in an open and transparent way
- Was disappointed that it had been unable properly scrutinise this decision as they had not been provided with sufficient information;
- Was concerned that (i) furthermore communication with affected service users has not been as clear; (ii) as this was an emotionally sensitive issue consultation with service users should have occurred before, not after, the decision was made;
- Was extremely concerned about the impact of these changes and the risks which may follow;
- Noted that the Cabinet report states that 101 reviews have been carried out and to date only 12 people have alternative arrangements in place;
- Wish to know if it is feasible to find alternative services which can be delivered by March 2020;
- Noted that they may require the Executive to submit a report to Council within such reasonable time as the Committee specifies should they believe that a key decision has been taken which was not (a) Published in advance in accordance with the Council's constitution; (b) The subject of the urgency procedure; or (c) The subject of an agreement with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or the Speaker;
- Noted that the power to require a report rests with them, but is also delegated to the Chief Executive, who shall require such a report on behalf of the Committee when so requested in writing by (a) The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; (b) three Members of the



Overview and Scrutiny Committee; or (c) by a resolution passed at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

- Noted that the Executive would then prepare a report setting out the date of the decision, particulars of the decision, the individual or body making the decision, and if the Mayor is of the opinion that it was not a key decision, the reasons for that opinion;
- Noted there should also be details of any alternative decisions that were considered and why they were rejected, and the names of any member who has declared a conflict of interest in relation to the decision (if any); and
- Noted that the report will be submitted to the next ordinary meeting of Council. However, if the next meeting of Council is within ten days of receipt of the written notice, or the resolution of the Committee, then the report may be submitted to the Council meeting after that.

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

Nil items

**13. 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.

**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 9.30 p.m.**

**Chair,  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**