

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2020**

**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’s & 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 Bex White	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment
Councillor Andrew Wood	

**Co-opted Members Present:**

Halima Islam	– Co-Optee
James Wilson	– Co-Optee

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Sabina Akhtar	– Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit
Mayor John Biggs	

**Apologies:**

Councillor Eve McQuillan

**Officers Present:**

Sharon Godman	– (Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance)
Janet Fasan	– (Divisional Director, Legal, Governance)
Teresa Heaney	– (Interim Customer Services Programme Director)
Dan Jones	– (Divisional Director, Public Realm)
Daniel Kerr	– (Strategy and Policy Manager)
David Knight	– (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

**1. ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair indicated that he thought it appropriate that the Order of Business be varied:

Accordingly, the Chair Moved the following motion for the consideration of Committee Members, and it was: -

**RESOLVED**

To vary the order of business to consider Item 8.3, One O'clock Club - Verbal Update as the first item to be considered.

To aid clarity, the minutes are presented in the order that the items originally appeared on the agenda.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST**

Nil items

**3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

**3.1 27th January 2020**

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED**

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

**3.2 18th February 2020**

The Chair **Moved** and it was:

**RESOLVED**

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

**4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS**

Nil items

**5. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

Noted

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

As detailed in Item 3.2 the Committee noted that the decision made by the Mayor in Cabinet on Wednesday, 29th January 2020 in respect of agenda item 6.2 'Report on the outcome of the statutory consultation on the proposal to close Raine's Foundation School' had 'called in' by co-optees of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Dr Phillip Rice and Mr Ahmed Hussain ('Call-in Members').

## **7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

### **7.1 Customer Service - One Stop Closure and Digitalisation**

Councillor Sabina Akhtar (Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit); Dan Jones (Divisional Director, Public Realm); and Teresa Heaney (Interim Customer Services Programme Director) gave an overview of the changes taking place since the closure of One Stop Shops to the Committee. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows: The Committee:

- Was especially interested in (i) how the closure of One Stop Shops had been delivered, (ii) those issues that have arisen; and (iii) the plans that have been put in place to deliver further improvements;
- Noted most of the popular services can now be accessed online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without having to phone the Council or to visit a Council building;
- Noted that transitional arrangements are now in place, with improved communication, signage and training for staff;
- Was informed that (i) if residents wanted support in the Idea Store's then they can go online with free computers; scanners and wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi); (ii) in the Borough's Idea Stores assistance is also available to help them (do with); and (iii) for those that need more support an appointment service was available at Rushmead (do for);
- Noted that where people 'walk in' they are not turned away, but they are advised about the on-line services and encourage to self-serve. Whilst those who lack a device or confidence are supported as they would be at an Idea Store;
- Noted that where a 'walk in' needs a higher level of support this is provided although this might change if the appointment service becomes busier;
- Was advised that this transformation has (i) delivered considerable positive changes for residents; and (ii) will continue to improve the way residents interact with Council services;
- Noted that there had apparently been early challenges where staff in Idea Stores had not been providing the correct messages or support. Therefore, additional training had been rolled out and skills have been bolstered by the influx of staff from One Stop Shops;

- Noted that there had been a number of issues with the “virtual’ permits” system and how it has impacted upon customers. Therefore, paper permits for those who really need them are now available and there will be continued to support colleagues in parking to ensure the customer journey and advice is improved;
- Indicated that they had significant concerns about the way these changes are being implemented and the way it is impacting on the Borough’s residents e.g. service users have apparently been turned away from Rushmead in spite of assurances that every effort is made to accommodate residents who turn up at Rushmead;
- Had concerns about the support that is being given to residents and the skillsets of staff in place to support residents;
- Wanted (i) there to be support for older people and those whose first language is not English; (ii) there to be a feedback loop for customers using the digital hubs; and (iii) statistics on staffing levels at the Idea Stores;
- Expressed concern that some officers seemed unaware of the poor experiences reported to councillors by residents and wanted the service to gather better intelligence from residents;
- Noted that parking permits are now ‘virtual’, paperless permits. This means that residents will no longer receive a paper permit to put in their motor vehicle. Instead, parking officers will be able to check on the system if any vehicle has a valid permit. However, Members expressed concerns about this ‘virtual’ system as it was felt to be a difficult system to use and Members were alarmed at the number of residents who are apparently (i) unaware of this new system; and (ii) are unable to access the ‘virtual’ system to get a permit;
- Indicated that there does not seem to be a clear criterion for who should receive paper or a ‘virtual’ permit;
- Commented the poor response time for residents’ requests for guidance and support; and
- Observed that it is accepted that this has been one of the key challenges and expressed disappointment that officers had been unable to confirm a timescale of when this issue will be fixed and would like to see a better plan in place to address this.

The Chair Moved and it was:

**RESOLVED** to:

Request:

1. A report on the Parking Service to include (i) details of the number of older residents who had gone from using the paper scratch cards to “virtual’ permits”; and (ii) a comparative analysis of permits issued since the introduction of “virtual’ permits” against the same period in 2019;
2. That (i) there should be support for older people and those whose first language is not English; (ii) there needs to be a feedback loop for

customers using the digital hubs; and (iii) statistics on staffing levels at the Idea Stores should be made available to the Committee.

## **8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **8.1 Scrutiny Challenge Session Report: Premises Charges**

The Committee received a report that provided an overview of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Premises Charges and Community Benefit Rent Reduction Scheme undertaken by the Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance and made six recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Thanked Councillor Candida Ronald (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector) for her attendance at the session;
- Noted that the scrutiny challenge session had aimed to (i) assess the effectiveness of the scheme in mitigating any potential impacts on voluntary and community sector organisations following the introduction of premises charges; and (ii) whether the scheme goes far enough to ensure that there is a thriving voluntary and community sector in Tower Hamlets;
- Was informed that the session had been chaired by Councillor Tarik Khan (Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance) and had been attended by council officers, partners and community organisations who contributed to the session;
- Recognised that the Voluntary and Community Sector play an important role in the Council meeting its duty under the Act through providing among other things employment, key services and community spaces for residents which make a positive impact in the lives of residents through helping eliminate discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people.
- Observed that the report made six recommendations relating to several key areas where the Council can make changes to improve an organisations ability to operate and provide services for residents. The recommendations also aim to improve transparency around community buildings in the Borough and to raise the Council's recognition of the value these buildings have to voluntary and community sector organisations;
- Noted that it is the role of councillors to consider issues that impact community and its residents; and
- Was informed that this report and recommendations aim to highlight the unique and powerful role of that the VCS in the fabric of the community which contributes to improving outcomes for local people and reducing dependency on public services.

The Chair Moved and it was:

**RESOLVED** to agree the report

## **8.2 Progress update from Children's and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee - Presentation**

The Committee received an update on the work of the Children's and Education Sub-Committee. The main points of the discussions on the update may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- Noted that the decision to establish the Children's and Education Sub-Committee had been taken in order to improve the alignment of the Councils scrutiny structure with the Council's key strategic priorities;
- Noted that the Children's and Education Sub-Committee also intended to continue to provide effective support and challenge for Children's Services following the achievement of the 'good' Ofsted rating;
- Noted that the decision to create the Children's and Education Sub-Committee has proven to be especially useful as there has been a number of significant issues which have needed the resource of a dedicated committee to ensure that effective scrutiny is carried out;
- Noted that the Children's and Education Sub-Committee has focused on the (i) on the outcome of public representations received in response to the statutory proposal to close Raines Church of England Foundation School, school exclusions; (ii) Special educational needs and disability (SEND); (iii) School improvement and the role of Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP); (iv) Youth service provision for girls; (v) Children's social care improvement – 6 months post Ofsted; and (vi) The decision to close the Victoria Park One O'clock club.
- Noted that in the final meetings of this municipal year, the Sub-Committee will consider
  - (i) SEND Transport Review;
  - (ii) Primary School review; and
  - (iii) A challenge session on cyberbullying.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:

**RESOLVED** to agree the update

## **8.3 One O'clock Club - Verbal Update**

### **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Following due consideration and receipt of legal advice the decision was taken to exclude the public from the meeting for a short period of time. This was to facilitate the discussion of the information in the report that could prejudice the commercial interests of a third party. Due consideration was given to the impact on the Council should such information be released into

the public domain and therefore it was considered that the public interest in knowing the information was outweighed by the public interest in maintaining the exemption.

The Committee agreed to adopt the following motion

“That, under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from part of the Presentation on the grounds that it contains information defined as Exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.”

The Committee reviewed the decision to close the One O'clock club in Victoria Park. This had been initially considered by the Children's Sub-Committee in December and had then been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider whether this should have been a 'key decision'.

The Chair Moved and it was:

**RESOLVED** that on the basis of the information and advice received the change to a key decision was warranted.

**9. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

The Committee received and noted a report that provided an update of recent and upcoming Overview & Scrutiny Committee activity.

**10. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**

As per attached appendices

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

Nil items

**12. 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.

**13. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

Nil items

**14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items

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

Nil items

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

Nil items

**The meeting ended at 8.35 p.m.**

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