

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.32 P.M. ON MONDAY, 25 JANUARY 2021

ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)

Members Present:

Councillor James King (Chair)	
Councillor Bex White (Vice-Chair)	– Scrutiny Lead for Children and Education
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	– Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	– Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Denise Jones	
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	– Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Leema Qureshi	– Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance
Councillor Andrew Wood	

Co-opted Members Present:

Halima Islam	– Co-Opted Member
James Wilson	– Co-Opted Member

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Asma Begum

Officers Present:

Onyekachi Ajisafe	– (Strategy & Policy Officer, Strategy, Policy & Performance)
Marcus Barnett	– Detective Chief Superintendent - BCU Commander
Adam Boey	– (Senior Strategy & Policy Manager - Corporate)
Ann Corbett	– (Divisional Director, Community Safety)
Sharon Godman	– (Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance)
Mike Hamer	– Metropolitan Police Service
Afazul Hoque	– (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Daniel Kerr	– (Strategy and Policy Manager)

David Knight	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)
Calvin McLean	– Head of Neighbourhood (Operations)
Filuck Miah	– (Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Policy Team)
Ann Otesanya	– Director of Neighbourhoods Tower Hamlets Homes
Andy Port	– The Metropolitan Police Service
Barry Scales	– (Project Lead Community Safety Transformation)
Chris Weavers	– Chair of Safer Neighbourhood Board
Joel West	– (Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received at this meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

The following Members for transparency declared a potential interest in relation to the Item 9 Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions:

- I. Councillor Marc Francis due to his wife Councillor Rachel Blake being the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing; and
- II. Councillor Ehtasham Haque due to wife Councillor Sabina Akhtar being the Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit.

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 11th January 2020 be approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil Items

5. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

Noted

6. COVID-19 UPDATE

The Committee received an update from Covid-19 from Somen Banerjee – Director of Public Health, the main points of the questioning maybe summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ Asked if vaccines would be “thrown away” rather than being given as second doses or to ‘other cohorts’? Noted that with the Pfizer vaccine there is a risk of wasting the vaccine because of its short shelf-life of 3.5 days and therefore the GP Care Group has had a group of people who they can be contacted at short notice and to date agencies have managed to not waste a significant percentage of the Pfizer vaccine and the system does appear to be working. Also, when there is an increased availability of the AstraZeneca vaccine this will not be such an issue given that it can be stored and transported at regular fridge temperature like flu vaccines, with a shelf life of over six months.
- ❖ Asked if the vaccine uptake has been lowering among minority ethnic groups and what are the barriers to uptake within the Covid-19 vaccination programme and are there any comparisons in the uptake of the Influenza vaccine. Noted that Initial data is showing lower rates for those from BAME groups aged 80 plus compared to those aged 80 plus and white.
- ❖ Commented that the testing positivity rate seemed high and wondered how confident can LBTH be in testing assisting in the controlling the spread of Covid-19. Noted that (i) overall that there is a high level of willingness to take up the Covid-19 vaccines. However, marked differences exist by ethnicity, with the Black population the most likely to be Covid-19 vaccine hesitant followed by the South Asian community ; and (ii) there is an element of people having concerns about the vaccine however it is important to recognise that a key factor in the over eighties is that people want to go to community-based vaccination sites. However, the GP Care Group will be contacting those individuals who are not taking up vaccine and talking through what the issues are and how do to resolve those issues.
- ❖ Commented that there has been additional Government funding for increasing that vaccine uptake and therefore how will LBTH be making the decisions about how such funding will be used in the most effective way to target those communities where there is any vaccine hesitancy?
- ❖ Commented that whilst generally communities have high positivity towards taking vaccines agencies should still be pushing testing above national average and seeking to expand the testing capacity.
- ❖ Noted initially the expectation was that high levels were anticipated in the Bangladeshi community, but testing rates were lower. Whilst now they are higher by undertaking testing in those areas where there is a high prevalence of the virus which has increased the uptake of testing by those communities.
- ❖ Noted that one should be wary about using the Influenza vaccination data as a proxy for issues around Covid e.g. for the Black population

there has always been a low uptake for Influenza vaccinations and as mentioned earlier this is also the case for Covid but for the South Asian community their Influenza uptake has been better than the average which is the opposite of what is being seen with Covid. Also, with the Influenza vaccine you can get that through the local GP or the Community Pharmacist which might be underpinning the inequalities in the uptake of vaccines.

- ❖ Noted that alongside dealing with the numbers of Covid patients the NHS must meet the needs of patients requiring admission for other forms of treatment.
- ❖ Asked if the Nightingale hospital at London's ExCel was at capacity and noted that whilst it was near full capacity that facility takes in patients from an area wider than Tower Hamlets.
- ❖ Noted that from mid-February 2021 those residents with underlying health conditions **e.g.** diabetes, high cholesterol, or asthma will be vaccinated.
- ❖ Agreed that it is important that it is important this group of residents vaccinated as quickly as possible.
- ❖ Noted that work is ongoing with the local GP Care Group and pharmacies to offer the coronavirus vaccine to help with the Government's aim of vaccinating everyone in the most vulnerable groups identified by the middle of February 2021.
- ❖ Noted that considerable work is being done by the Council's Divisional Director of Communications and his Team with both national and local media to ensure that there are effective communications to help overcome challenges such as vaccine hesitancy and to increase uptake **e.g.** Bangla TV the Bengali language television channel.

Accordingly, the Chair thanked Somen Banerjee – Director of Public Health for his presentation and for the high level of detail that he had provided.

7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

7.1 ASB - Review the effectiveness of partnership response to ASB and the quality of service residents and victims of ASB receive

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor Asma Begum (Deputy Mayor & Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Equalities); Ann Corbett (Divisional Director, Community Safety); and Calvin Mclean (Head of Neighbourhood Operations). In addition, the Chair informed the meeting that Chris Weavers (Chair of Safer Neighbourhood Board – SNB)) was in attendance to share the Boards perspective on the effectiveness of partnership response and the quality of service. The main points of the discussion maybe summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ Commented that it seemed be confusing for tenants and residents as to who they should report anything causing a nuisance or annoyance **e.g.** their Registered Social Landlord or the Council?

- ❖ Noted that through the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) which is a partnership between housing associations (registered providers) and the Council has worked hard to make reporting of ASB as straightforward as possible with an online portal [Report anti-social behaviour - Tower Hamlets Homes](#) which has meant Tower Hamlets appears second in the list of London boroughs with the highest rate of reported anti-social behaviour (ASB). With the information the Council and its partners now have there is increased confidence in reporting which in turn encourages others to report ASB and therefore Tower Hamlets is getting an increasing number of reports of ASB **e.g.** between April and December last year there were 9k incidents of ASB were reported.
- ❖ Indicated that they wanted anti-social behaviour tackled and to reduce the harm that it causes. Commented that all residents have the right to feel safe in their homes and the community, including businesses and visitors to the Borough, which is why it is important that reducing anti-social behaviour needs to be a priority for the Council, the Police and for other members of the Tower Hamlets Community Safety Partnership.
- ❖ Expressed concern at the apparent use of motor transport to bring people to locations to in the Borough; drift driving and apparently many drivers/passengers are not Tower Hamlets residents? Noted that Tower Hamlets has introduced the Liveable Streets programme which aims to improve the look and feel of public spaces in neighbourhoods across the Borough and to design out issues such as vehicle-borne anti-social behaviour.
- ❖ Wanted to know what is being done to address the illegal use of nitrous oxide for its psychoactive effect? Noted that whilst there is currently no penalty for possession nitrous oxide it is such a big issue for residents and features in a lot of residence complaints and around rowdy inconsiderate behaviour. Therefore, there is currently a consultation on the introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO). The PSPO can be introduced in a specific public area where the Council is satisfied on reasonable grounds that certain conditions have been met **e.g.** The first test concerns the nature activities that have taken place have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that activities will take place and that they will have a detrimental effect on the area.
- ❖ In response to questions noted that as part of the pre-consultation exercise there were discussions with groups of young people and third sector organisations. This was because the Council did not want to have an adverse impact on and to criminalize young people. Accordingly, the Council wanted to make sure that there is a proper support **e.g.**, an education program around the dangers of nitrous oxide. Noted the Council are currently consulting and have so far received approximately 100 responses in the past two weeks as it is a big issue for residents and in accordance with the substance Misuse Strategy as agreed by the Mayor and Cabinet in 2020 it has the key strands of treatment/recovery and regulation/enforcement.

- ❖ After questioning officers noted that the SNB is satisfied that the appropriate data sharing arrangements are in place between the Board, Council, Police Services, and other agencies. Noted that in addition to patterns of behaviour certain things drive ASB the night-time economy and transport nodes being two significant features. In addition, there is a direct correlation between the number of licensed premises/restaurants and major Underground/DLR interchanges with the highest incidences of ASB.
- ❖ In response to questions noted local concerns regarding and lost police operational time when police officers are withdrawn from duty in Tower Hamlets for the purpose of policing a) demonstrations in Central London and b) requirements to cover security activities in Central London. In response it was noted that whilst the SNB were not informed of every abstraction for every ward as it happens the Board does take a close interest in the levels of abstractions and their impact on policing in the Borough. Noted (i) that the SNB receives regular reports on the patterns/activity and what BCU is doing to try minimise such attractions; (ii) the health and safety issues regarding Airbnb during the pandemic in relation to such properties being used for large scale parties that breach Covid regulations and the need for ensure that all landlords are made aware of their responsibilities and that action will be taken if their property is used in breach of the Covid guidelines.

Finally, the Chair thanked Councillor Asma Begum; Ann Corbett; Calvin Mclean; and Chris Weavers for their presentation and participation in the discussions on this topic.

7.2 Police Service Basic Command Units (BCU) views and issues for Tower Hamlets

The Committee received a presentation from Marcus Barnett (Detective Chief Superintendent - BCU Commander - Central East – Hackney and Tower Hamlets); Mike Hamer – (Superintendent Crime Investigations, Central East – Hackney and Tower Hamlets); and Andy Port (Superintendent Neighbourhood Policing, Central East – Hackney and Tower Hamlets) on views and issues for Tower Hamlets: The main points of the discussion maybe summarised as follows:

The Committee

- ❖ Expressed concern over the issue of a prolonged abstractions of Designated Ward Police Officers and the impact that, that can have in dealing with anti-social behaviour as opposed to criminal activity. Noted that because the Basic Command Unit (BCU) officers are trained to certain skills they will have to go and police other parts of London.
- ❖ Following questioning of the officers noted that whenever the BCU faces significant abstraction levels they must look at carefully certain parts of the business that cannot afford to drop below what is describe as an absolute minimum strength requirement. Also, when the BCU

must extract resources on the funded posts they always speak to the partner agency to tell them when they are going to have to abstract officers. Noted whilst the BCU wants to maintain an absolute optimum level now as it stands the BCU has all the officers it should have within all the neighbourhood and ward panels.

- ❖ Expressed concern at the use of Section 60s the BCU has worked hard in recent months around the partnership messaging regarding its utilisation in conjunction with stop and search. Noted that the use of Section 60 is very much about preventing and detecting violence on the streets based on intelligence that says it is believed that there is violence going to occur and weapons will be used or violence has happened and the BCU wants to prevent further violence from happening. It enables officers and others who will come into the BCU to provide support to search people. However, officers still must justify the grounds for any search in a specific geographical location.
- ❖ In addition, were advised that the BCU make sure that partners and the community understand why and when a Section 60 has been authorised through a partnership message to let people know what is being done and why. Noted that on the issue of Section 60 the SNB has taken its use very seriously and in recent months and have closely scrutinised the BCU on this issue and asked questions about whether there is a need to undertake the various searches or whether in fact the searches could be undertaken under other areas of legislation.
- ❖ Noted concerns about the outcome of an incident that had happened during a specific Section 60 that had been authorised a sometime prior to the arrival of the current BCU Commander. The OSC Member who had raised this issue was asked to write directly to BCU Commander to provide more information about that incident.
- ❖ Following further question noted details about Operation Continuum that had developed as a partnership approach to tackle crime, disorder and violence linked to the street-based drug markets. This has enabled the Council and partners to use local knowledge, experience, and resources to support the BCU disrupt and enforce perpetrators of crime and the anti-social behaviour linked to drug dealing. Noted the BCU want to hit drug dealers in the pocket and one of their aims is to seize assets using various aspects of legislation and the Home Office make allocations of seized assets according to formulas based on productivity to different BCUs. Accordingly, in the Metropolitan Police Service there is a fund that supports operations and the most productive BCU's receive a significant share of that money to use in their work around drug dealing.
- ❖ As a result of questioning noted that the Central East – Hackney and Tower Hamlets BCU gets a substantial share of that money through a bidding on an operation-by-operation basis and used to target further drug trafficking.
- ❖ In reply to questioning noted that as 2020 has been a not representative year and it has been difficult to assess what progress has been made in making ward panels more representative. The anecdotal feedback has indicated that they look quite different as different people have been involved because the panel meetings have

taken place at different times of day and it will therefore take a little longer to make any meaningful assessment.

- ❖ Following questioning noted that with the Borough's population changes the BCU are looking at innovative ways for them to continue to reach and touch communities to ensure that residents have access to local policing **e.g.** do residents access services online or reporting through the neighbourhood hubs.
- ❖ As a result of questioning it was noted that Covid is an additional significant police priority and it will continue to be a priority to enforce the legislation but the BCU cannot afford to take their eyes off other areas. As Covid is an addition to the agreed policing priorities which absolutely remain. However, noted that the BCU has been very proactive and very robust around the enforcement of the Covid legislation and particularly in recent weeks around unlicensed music events. Also noted that before fines are issued to rule-breakers, police officers will first:
 - **Engage** with people, to ask why they appear to be breaking the rules.
 - **Explain** the law, stressing the risks to public health and the NHS.
 - **Encourage** them to change their behaviour; and
 - **Enforce** by issuing penalty notices, as a last resort.
- ❖ Noted however that most people in the community have adhered to the legislation which is clear about saving lives and protecting the NHS.

In conclusion, the Chair:

1. **Thanked** Marcus Barnett, Mike Hamer and Andy Port for their presentation and participation in the discussions on this topic.
2. **Indicated** that following consultation with Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety & Environment a report would be prepared for submission to the BCU on areas for continued scrutiny; and
3. **Noted** the offer by Marcus Barnett to return to a future meeting to discuss views and issues for Tower Hamlets BCU.

8. REPORT/PRESENTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 OSC Review of 2021-22 Budget Proposals

The Committee received and noted the draft copy of the Review of 2021-22 Budget Proposals it was noted that there had been proposed new elements for the Council's Budget Capital Programme, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) expenditure and income and other changes to savings.

Following a full and wide-ranging discussion it was **agreed** to:

- **Defer** detailed consideration of this report until the 1st of February Reserve Budget meeting; and

- **Formally** request the Interim Monitoring officer's approval to moving the start time of Monday night's Reserve OSC Budget meeting to an earlier start at 4:00 p.m. to facilitate discussions.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Following comments by the Committee the Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions (PDSQ) were agreed for submission to the Cabinet on the 27th January 2021 (See attached appendix).

10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Committee **noted** the updates that had been submitted from the Scrutiny Leads (**Attached as appendices to these minutes**).

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 reports and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

13. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil Items

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

Nil Items

15. 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**