

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.31 P.M. ON MONDAY, 1 MARCH 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)	
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	

Other Councillors Present:

Mayor John Biggs
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Candida Ronald

Officers Present:

Kevin Bartle	– (Corporate Director, Resources and Governance)
Adam Boey	– (Senior Strategy & Policy Manager - Corporate)
Ann Corbett	– (Divisional Director, Community Safety)
Thorsten Dreyer	– (Head of Intelligence and Performance)
Sharon Godman	– (Director, Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)
Afazul Hoque	– (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Hitesh Jolapara	– (Interim Divisional Director, Finance, Procurement & Audit)
Filuck Miah	– (Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Policy)

Denise Radley	Team)
Will Tuckley	– (Corporate Director, Health, Adults & Community)
David Knight	– (Chief Executive)
	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

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 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.
- III.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

3.1 Minutes of the 25th January, 2021

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25th January 2020 be approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Chair was authorised to sign them accordingly.

3.2 Minutes of 1st February, 2021

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st February 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:

- ❖ Was advised that since January there has been a significant improvement although the incidences of epidemic remain in the 25- to 34-year-olds and the 55- to 64-year-olds.
- ❖ Noted that across the Borough the highest levels are in Poplar; Bromley by Bow and Shadwell and the disparity trends to continue by ethnicity and is particularly prevalent amongst the Black African and Bangladeshi populations. Whilst there is still a disproportionately high number of cases in the Boroughs social housing.
- ❖ Noted that 40,000 Tower Hamlets residents have now had at least the first dose in terms of the priority the initial priority groups 80% of 80yrs and above; 78% of 75yrs to 79yrs and 39% of the clinically extremely vulnerable group. Although it was noted that this category has now been expanded from 9,000 based on the original criterion to 25,000 to the new criterion as clinically extremely vulnerable based on social variables such as ethnicity; deprivation and body-mass index. This has a particular effect on Tower Hamlets relative to other London boroughs as the number of clinically extremely vulnerable and has increased to a higher level than other boroughs across North-East London primarily because of ethnicity and deprivation.
- ❖ Noted that those individuals who are not taking up vaccine will be contacted to talk through if they have any issues about the vaccines and how those issues can be resolved.
- ❖ Noted that from the 1st of February 2021 a Vaccine Helpline funded by LBTH and supported with training and resources by GP Care Group had been established and is now open 7 days per week, between 8:00 am to 8:00 pm with multilingual staff to (i) answer queries; (ii) contact those who are vaccine hesitant; (iii) book appointments to local clinics and mass vaccination centres.
- ❖ Accepted that the impact of COVID-19 on communities was going to rely in part on the quality of communication regarding health risk and danger. Any co-ordinated approach by partners and stakeholders needs to take full account of the way life conditions, cultural values, and risk experience affect actions during a pandemic. Unfamiliarity with sociocultural, economic, psychological, and health factors within any community can jeopardise effective communication at all levels.
- ❖ Was advised that people with Learning Difficulties will now be prioritised for a Covid vaccine as they face a higher risk of death from Covid-19 and so will now be moved up the priority list.

- ❖ Noted that the Government is piloting a new diagnostic test, called a lateral flow test, for detecting the virus that causes Covid and to prioritise schools so when students go back to school, they will be given lateral flow tests in the school. However, the purpose of these lateral flow tests is to familiarise them with taking these tests at home so that it becomes part of routine life school children and children will self-administer lateral flow tests around twice a week. In addition, there will be an emphasis on families with an expansion of the availability of home testing through collection points.
- ❖ Noted that all businesses in England are now able to sign up to the Government's free COVID-19 workplace testing programme. Which is part of the Government's roadmap to cautiously lift restrictions, businesses of all sizes, including those with fewer than 50 employees, can register from today to order free lateral flow tests for their employees.
- ❖ Noted that approximately 1 in 3 people with Covid do not have symptoms, which means they could be spreading the virus in workplaces without knowing. As rapid testing detects cases quickly (in under 30 minutes) this means that positive cases can isolate immediately, breaking chains of transmission.
- ❖ Noted that regular testing could be the difference between a workplace being able to stay open and operational, or needing to close due to a Covid outbreak. It will therefore form a crucial part of the Government's plan to ease restrictions gradually and safely as we get back to a more normal life.
- ❖ Was advised that successful management of local outbreaks is a core element of NHS Test and Trace's ambition to break the chains of Covid transmission to enable people to return to and maintain a more normal way of life.
- ❖ Was informed that it in combating Covid it was critical to develop structures and ways of working, alongside existing emergency response mechanisms and to maximise their effectiveness.
- ❖ Commented that many Borough's Bangladeshi population live in extended families, often, with three generations under one roof. This means there are potentially a higher number of carriers who can infect an elderly relative. An older person also cannot effectively self-isolate when they are living in close quarters with their extended family.
- ❖ Indicated that all this makes Covid particularly troubling in Bangladeshi communities, some of which are, like Tower Hamlets, in the most deprived areas of the country, with poor health outcomes to match.
- ❖ Was pleased to note that going forward there would be increased use of the community-based venues for residents to get vaccinated **e.g.** GP Practices.
- ❖ Noted that there is emerging evidence on the long-term health effects of Covid **e.g.** long-term respiratory complications, thrombosis, heart failure, kidney injury, fatigue, joint and muscle pain, and metabolic abnormalities. However, long-term cohort studies are needed to better understand disease consequences in Covid patients.
- ❖ Noted that patients have experienced ongoing COVID-19 symptoms for several months after infection. These include fatigue, difficulties in

thinking, shortness of breath, chest pain, irregular or abnormal heart rhythm, and joint pain.

- ❖ Acknowledge that the pandemic is a chronic health crisis and clinicians will be required to maintain a state of high alert for an extended period
- ❖ Commented that the referendum in Tower Hamlets must be conducted safely against the backdrop of coronavirus restrictions, although there will need to be a risk assessment of key proceedings and put in place appropriate mitigations and additional measures to ensure that public health advice around physical distancing, proper hand hygiene and the use of face coverings is followed.
- ❖ Venues and staffing for the referendum are crucial, the Council should consider whether the venues they plan to use for polling and other election proceedings, including the count, allow for physical distancing. The Council also needs to consider whether they will need additional staff to assist with key aspects of the election in the context of Covid.
- ❖ Wanted to see early engagement with key stakeholders in the Borough including political parties, candidates, and agents is important, especially where normal arrangements may need to be adapted in line with Covid restrictions and public health advice.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked Somen Banerjee for his detailed presentation and to all members and guests for their contributions in the discussions on this topic.

7. UNRESTRICTED CABINET REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting - Q3 2020/21

The Committee received and commented on the strategic delivery and performance report for quarter 3 2020/21. The main points raised in the discussion on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ Noted that 15 performance indicators have been met or are exceeding their target and 8 are between the target and the minimum expectation, while 13 are falling short. Whilst the remaining 20 indicators are data only measures, do not have an outturn this quarter or they are based on the annual residents' survey which is due to take place in quarter 4.
- ❖ Noted that due to Covid some indicators for which data collection have been suspended or are not possible at present.
- ❖ Expressed concern that the number of adults supported into employment by the WorkPath service have fallen short of the minimum expectation as the labour market in the Borough continues to be particularly affected by the Covid and the lockdown measures to contain it. Also, like Inner London generally Tower Hamlets has experienced sharper decreases in those in paid employment when compared to Outer London.

- ❖ Noted that a greater proportion of Londoners across all age groups are now claiming unemployment related benefits compared with the rest of the Country.
- ❖ Expressed concern that younger people, especially those who have recently left education, have been especially hard hit by the economic impact of the pandemic. With youth unemployment increasing significantly.
- ❖ Stated that supporting and encouraging employers to provide opportunities for young people to access work experience, employment and training opportunities during this difficult period is vital. Previous recessions have highlighted the damaging long-term consequences of a period of unemployment when young to future earnings and employment outcomes, as well as on mental and physical health.
- ❖ Indicated their concern that in Quarter 2 the target for 22 per cent of household waste recycling was missed with only 19.8 per cent being achieved. However, officers (i) are redesigning the Service to improve recycling rates; (ii) are continuing to communicate the importance of recycling to residents and landlords to try and drive behavioural change; and (iii) can provide the Quarter 3 figures to the Committee once they become available.
- ❖ Noted that street cleansing service has been affected adversely by Covid as (i) a significant number of regular staff have been absent due to illness and/or self-isolation; and (ii) there has been a behavioural change in the Borough with people being at home has impacted on the cleanliness of local parks and seen the introduction of new technology to help identify hotspots and target resources to those areas quickly.
- ❖ Indicated that it was important to work with residents and businesses of Tower Hamlets to encourage and enable ways of dealing with waste
- ❖ Supported the Councils intention to collaborate with and provide leadership to businesses, housing associations and others that have a responsibility for managing waste.
- ❖ Recognised the challenges faced by the Service with (i) the number of businesses and people working in Tower Hamlets increasing; and (ii) 80 per cent of the population living in flats.
- ❖ Wanted the Service to think about food waste recycling from private blocks as well as from estates given the demand for this service from within private developments.
- ❖ Was informed that since the start of the pandemic, LBTH has provided food provisions to support residents in poverty. E.g. (i) processed 4,952 referrals to food banks and voluntary and community sector organisations supporting those residents experiencing food poverty; and (ii) in November agreed a grant of £100,000 to support the Tower Hamlets Credit Union and other initiatives to increase access to fair finance including the un-banked, under-banked and small businesses.
- ❖ Noted that LBTH have continued to target those groups most likely out of work and the Financial and benefits advice service is rapidly changing its offer to focus on the pandemic recovery.
- ❖ Wanted to know (i) what was considered the best way was to help people in need when seek help through the Council and its partner organisations in these difficult times with universal credit, rent, council

tax, financial debts, and support with other needs; and (ii) how the Council works with other specialist organisations in the Borough who they can refer people to if needed.

In conclusion, the Chair:

1. **Thanked** Mayor John Biggs; Will Tuckley and Thorsten Dreyer for their presentation and to all members and guests for their contributions to the discussion on this topic; and
2. **Indicated** that Street Cleanliness; Universal Credit Benefit Maximisation; WorkPath and Advice Programmes should be added to the Committees Action Log.

7.2 Budget monitoring report 2020-21 as at 31st December 2020 (period 9)

The Committee received and commented on the Council's projected outturn position against General Fund, Dedicated Schools Budget, Housing Revenue Account, and earmarked reserves for 2020-21, based on forecasts as of 31st December 2020. The main points of the discussion arising from questioning on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ Noted that (i) the General Fund forecast position is a net overspend of £2.9m, a £3.2m deterioration on the P8 forecast; (ii) there is an underlying overspend of £15.2m in services (before contributions from reserves of £13m); and (iii) there are significant savings to be delivered in 2021/22, so strategically these are very challenging circumstances.
- ❖ Was troubled to note that (i) any overspend at the year-end will have to be financed from reserves; and (ii) the reserves position remains uncertain pending the delayed closure and audit of the Council's accounts for the period 2016 – 2020.
- ❖ Was concerned that the Council's response to the pandemic continues to overlay considerable complexity and uncertainty to forecasting, given that the financial impact ranges from additional expenditure requirements, increases in demand from vulnerable clients, consequential losses of income, unachievable savings and for services having to work differently.
- ❖ Was informed that the forecasting in this area is also affected both by the unknown length of the emergency and indeed the extent and depth of any consequential recession. Therefore, it was important the Council gets great clarity in respect of reporting and monitoring if it is to address it's a "very challenging" financial position and delivers the planned savings.
- ❖ Was advised that Tower Hamlets as are all councils is finding it impossible to plan for the pandemic as the Council is in the middle of trying to deliver services and the financial position has been running behind the delivery of services.

- ❖ Was informed that the underspend on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is to do with the day-to-day maintenance and repairs programme and not the long-term capital programme
- ❖ Wanted to know how the Council intends (i) to develop forecasts and projections to highlight areas of likely financial failure and to move to financial sustainability; (ii) to spend the Covid Emergency Funding for related expenditure.
- ❖ Noted that due to Covid whilst the Council has had underspends in Housing; Regeneration; Public Realm; Planning; Building Control that are not expected to see replicated in future years.
- ❖ Commented that if the Council is going to arrest the ongoing decline of the reserves it is essential that the responsible officers spend within their budgets.
- ❖ Wanted to receive an explanation on the reasons for the overspend in regarding Homeless Services

In conclusion, the Chair:

- A. **Thanked** Councillor Candida Ronald; Kevin Bartle; and Hitesh Jolapara for their presentation and to all members for their contributions in the discussions on this topic; and
- B. **Indicated** that the following should be added to the Committees Action Log (i) details of necessary and additional Covid-19 expenditure; (ii) the development of forecasts and projections to highlight areas of likely financial failure and move to financial sustainability; (iii) to spend the Covid Emergency Funding for related expenditure; (iv) Why there was an overspend in Homeless Services.

7.3 Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-2024

The Committee received and commented on the Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-23. The main points of the discussion on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ Welcomed the partnership Community Safety Plan for 2021-24 and the priorities set out in the plan.
- ❖ Noted that the Crime and Anti-social behaviour continue to be a key priority for residents as highlighted in the Annual Residents Survey. From the 2019 survey we know 48% of residents said that crime and ASB as their top concern.
- ❖ Noted a number of indicators on concerns about ASB being problem that had risen over the year including:
 - A. People using or dealing drugs.
 - B. People being drunk or rowdy.
 - C. Noisy neighbours; and
 - D. Vandalism and graffiti.

- ❖ Noted in the report the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on crime and ASB and as there was no Annual Residents Survey last year these indicators were also likely to rise. The Committee was pleased therefore that tackling neighbourhood crime and ASB is reflected as a priority in the Plan.
- ❖ Noted that LBTH had the highest level of reported ASB in London and that Covid and lockdown measures were contributing to rise in demand. It also noted that substance misuse is one the key drivers for ASB. The Community Safety Partnership confirmed that it was managing ASB levels using engagement, support and enforcement model for people engaged in substance misuse.
- ❖ Wanted to ensure partnership work with RSLs is reflected in the plan. Many larger ones are focused on addressing ASB with patrol services like Parkguard. It is particularly key LBTH ensures THH are achieving value for money from their ASB services now that patrol services have been passed directly to tenants and leaseholders.
- ❖ Questioned whether increase reporting of ASB a good sign of people's confidence in systems for reporting is or whether it was as a result of people seeing more ASB.
- ❖ Wanted to see performance indicators against the outcomes that the partnership is seeking to achieve to enable the partnership to measure progress and also for the public to be able to hold agencies to account.
- ❖ Wanted to see the delivery plan on tackling neighbourhood crime and ASB and have an opportunity to feed into this.
- ❖ Indicated that given the on-going discussion about the Chinese Embassy and the need for visible and protective security this should be a key priority.
- ❖ Stressed the need for clear communication to residents about how to report ASB and who is responsible for addressing as there is still confusion amongst residents as they are passed on by agencies.
- ❖ Agreed that engaging, empowering, and hearing the voice and concerns of local residents needs to be at the forefront of the delivery and annual review of the plan.

In conclusion, the Chair:

- A. **Thanked** Councillor Sirajul Islam; Denise Radley; and Ann Corbett for their presentation and to all members for their contributions in the deliberations on this topic.
- B. **Indicated** that the comments of the Committee would be presented to the by Cabinet before the report is submitted to Full Council; and
- C. **Stated** that as part of the Committee's work programme for 2021-2022 it will be important to review progress against this plan and welcomed the engagement of partners in the scrutiny process.

8. CHAIRING OF THE MEETING

Councillor James King vacated the Chair and withdrew from the meeting.
Councillor Bex White assumed the Chair for the rest of the meeting.

9. CHALLENGE SESSION REPORT

9.1 Idea Store and Library Services Scrutiny Challenge Session

The Committee received and noted a report on the Idea Store and Library Services Scrutiny Challenge Session. The main points of the discussion on the report is outlined below:

The Committee noted that:

- ❖ Councillor Leema Qureshi had decided to hold a Finance and Resource Scrutiny Challenge Session to focus on the Council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services.
- ❖ The Challenge Session had been underpinned by the following core questions:
 - A. To what extent of change will the revised approach for Idea Stores and library services impact on user groups from the community? What are the planned mitigation options and what's the evidence from users and residents?
 - B. Based on the public engagement what can be learnt and taken forward or changed about the suggested proposals for the revised approach to Idea Stores and library services?
 - C. What is the five-year vision for the future for the future of the Idea Stores and library services including future funding proposals and risk implications?
- ❖ The Challenge Session held virtually on 28 January 2021 was chaired by Councillor Leema Qureshi (Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources). The session had been structured to included: Chair's overview - reason for the enquiry and session outcome, was a presentation from the service led by Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit supported by council officers, Youth Council representatives provided service user feedback, Voluntary Sectors Children and Youth Forum Coordinator provided an external perspective from the Third Sector. The Challenge Session had resulted in the development of a number of recommendations set out in the attached report:

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

RESOLVED to:

1. **Note** the attached Idea Stores and Library Services Scrutiny Challenge Session Report and agree the recommendations; and
2. **Agreed** to submit the attached report to the Mayor and Cabinet for an executive response.

9.2 How does the Council apply evidence-based and best practice to influence resident behaviour change to boost recycling rates?

The Committee received a report that outlined the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (OSC) Challenge Session examining how the Council applies evidence-based and best practice to influence resident behaviour to boost recycling. A summary of the discussion on the report is outlined as follows:

The Committee noted that:

- ❖ The former Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety, Councillor Bex White had decided to hold this Challenge Session with the focus on how the Council applies evidence-based and best practice to influence resident behaviour change to boost recycling rates?
- ❖ Tower Hamlets had performed poorly in terms of recycling waste (23.2% of total waste is recycled) compared to other boroughs (Bexley 54.1%, Waltham Forest 31.6%, Greenwich 33.4%, Hackney 27.9%, City of London 29.9%) with only Newham lower at 16.9%. Whilst Executive Mayor John Biggs had set an ambitious target for Tower Hamlets of 35% recycling by 2022.
- ❖ The Challenge Session had aimed to understand how the Council has responded to the flagging recycling rates in the Borough, with a particular focus on influencing resident behaviour.
- ❖ The Challenge Session had been underpinned by the following core questions:
 - A. To what extent is evidence based and external research applied in how the Council uses its resources to achieve behaviour change on recycling?
 - B. How is the Council using outcomes of pilot projects to improve mainstream delivery?
 - C. How is the Council maximising the influence on residents including those schools who are very committed to increasing recycling?
 - D. Can the Council highlight any insights (behavioural change) on campaigns for resident engagement on recycling and the impact?
- ❖ The Challenge Session had been held virtually on 23 September 2020 and chaired by Councillor Bex White commencing with a Chair's overview, followed by a joint presentation from the former Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm, Councillor Asma Islam, supported by council officers.
- ❖ Resource London had also been invited to the session as they are (i) a London-wide partnership programme; and (ii) the Government efficiency resource body.
- ❖ Resource London works closely with Tower Hamlets Waste and Recycling Service and they had provided an external perspective on insights from research such as factors influencing recycling behaviour change.

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

RESOLVED to:

1. **Note** the attached Scrutiny Challenge Session Report on how the Council applies evidence-based and best practice to influence resident behaviour change to boost recycling rates and agree the recommendations; and
2. **Agree** to submit the attached report to the Mayor and Cabinet for an executive response.

10. 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 3rd March 2021 (**See attached appendix**).

11. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Committee **noted** the updates that had been submitted from the Scrutiny Leads (**See attached appendix**).

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

12.1 Action Log 2020-21 Update

Noted

13. 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.

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

Nil Items

The meeting ended at 8.33 p.m.
Chair, Councillor James King
Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Meeting of the

CABINET

Wednesday, 3 March 2021 at 5.30 p.m.

TABLED PAPERS

**PAGE
NUMBER**

5.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) to report on any issues raised by the OSC in relation to unrestricted business to be considered.

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Pre-decision scrutiny questions and officer responses and also the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consideration of the Community Safety Partnership Plan.

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Community Safety partnership Plan 2021-24 Comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 1st March 2021

The Committee welcomes the partnership Community Safety Plan for 2021-24 and the priorities set out in the plan.

Crime and Anti-social behaviour continues to be a key priority for residents as highlighted in the Annual Residents Survey. From the 2019 survey we know 48% of residents said that crime and ASB as their top concern. We also saw a number of indicators on concerns about ASB being problem had risen over the year including:

- People using or dealing drugs
- People being drunk or rowdy
- Noisy neighbours
- Vandalism and graffiti

As noted in the report the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on crime and ASB and as there was no Annual Residents Survey last year these indicators were also likely to rise. The Committee was pleased therefore that tackling neighbourhood crime and ASB is reflected as a priority in the Plan.

The Committee held a Scrutiny Spotlight Session with Borough Commander and Cabinet member for Community Safety and Equalities in January 21 and some of the issues that came out from that session are outlined below:

ASB spotlight

The Committee:

- enquired the rationale behind three different ASB reporting systems and the confusion this brings to their constituents (tenants and residents) for reporting ASB. They further enquired if there were plans to integrate or streamline the ASB reporting systems;
- noted that LBTH had the highest level of reported ASB in London and that Covid and lockdown measures were contributing to rise in demand. It also noted that substance misuse is one the key drivers for ASB. The Community Safety Partnership confirmed that it was managing ASB levels using engagement, support and enforcement model for people engaged in substance misuse;
- wanted to understand the efforts being made to address car ASB (transportation of people to different locations in the borough), use of nitrous oxide and Air BnB properties being used for large gatherings and breaching Covid regulations;
- enquired on the level of collaboration between enforcement team, council's highway department and others in dealing with Car ASB, nitrous oxides in estates, use of Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) in the context of ASB and the number of officers available for community policing;
- recommended ASB levels are compared with local populations when prioritising areas for action rather than a ward by ward basis; and
- requested the Community Safety Service to report back to O&S Committee in March 2021 on the consultation results and approach for ASB linked to nitrous oxide.

Borough Commander Spotlight

The Committee:

- raised concerns about the prolonged absences of Designated Ward Officers (DWO) and the impact this has on responding to ASB;
- questioned the recurrent use of Section 60 powers (stop and search) and wanted to understand how this impacted the relationship between the Borough Commander Unit (BCU) and community;
- heard how the BCU's partnership approach to 'Operation Continuum' benefited in tackling crime, disorder and violence linked to street-based drug markets and how the partnership approach benefited the Council and partners to use local intelligence and resources to support the BCU in disrupting perpetrators of crime and ASB linked to drug dealing;
- wanted to understand what happens to recovered money from illegal activities and they were informed that the Home Office makes allocations of seized assets according to formulas based on productivity to different BCUs;
- questioned the Borough Commander (BC) about the level of progress made to improve diversity and make the Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panels more representative. The BC responded that the pandemic had impacted the ability to adequately assess the progress on ward panels being more representative; and
- questioned the BC about the volume of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) being issued to residents for breach Covid regulations and wanted further understanding as to which demography was most impacted and what happens the fines being collected.

On the Plan itself the Committee made the following comments:

- Ensure partnership work with RSLs is reflected in the plan. Many larger ones are focused on addressing ASB with patrol services like Parkguard. It is particularly key LBTH ensures THH are achieving value for money from their ASB services now patrol services have been passed directly to tenants and leaseholders.
- Questioned whether increase reporting of ASB is a good sign of people's confidence in systems for reporting or whether it was as a result of people seeing more ASB;
- The need to have performance indicators against the outcomes the partnership is seeking to achieve to enable the partnership to measure progress and also for the public to be able to hold agencies to account;
- The Committee would be keen to see the delivery plan on tackling neighbourhood crime and ASB and have an opportunity to feed into this;
- Given the on-going discussion about the Chinese Embassy and the need for visible and protective security this needs to be a key priority;
- As previously highlighted by scrutiny need for clear communication to residents about how to report ASB and who is responsible for addressing as there is still confusion amongst residents as they are passed on by agencies;
- That engaging, empowering and hearing the voice and concerns of local residents needs to be at the forefront of the delivery and annual review of this plan.

The Committee hopes our comments are considered by Cabinet before the report is submitted to Full Council. Finally, as part of the Committee's work programme for 2021-2022 it will be important to review progress against this plan and we will welcome the engagement of partners in the scrutiny process.

Cllr James King
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY QUESTIONS (PDSQ) FOR CABINET

Wednesday, 3 March 2021 at 5.30 p.m.

Item 6.1 Idea Stores Post Consultation Report	
Questions	Response
<p>1. It is recommended that Watney Market Ideas Store operates with only a single floor. However, the ground floor has a significantly smaller footprint for users than the upper floors due to it being the location of the various meeting, interview and staff rooms and the back office. If it is planned to use the ground floor as the single floor in operation and there are no plans to reconfigure the layout, the space available - particularly for bookshelves - will be extremely small. What is the expected impact in terms of loss of desk and shelf space as a percentage of the current capacity?</p>	<p>Our current plans, once the building is released as a Covid testing site, are to reconfigure the ground floor to maximise the space available and deliver the Library service from this space. However, options for the best use of the full space in the building are to be developed and as other services move into the building we may wish to explore better solutions. The advantage of using the ground floor is that ISWM is very popular with families and children and those with buggies would not have to negotiate the lift.</p>
<p>2. When does LBTH think the new Crossharbour Idea Stores would be open?</p>	<p>We are dependent on the planning application which is still in process as well as on the developers. We therefore can't give a firm timescale at this point. We believe it is likely to be approx. 5 years away.</p>

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6.2 Outcome of consultation on revised approach to day support in adult social care

Questions	Response
<p>1. The timetable to close the Physical Disability Day Opportunities, Riverside day centre and Pritchard's Road day centre with effect from 4 May 2021 seems very tight. Is there any mitigation so that this could be delayed until after September to allow for a transition to alternative provision?</p>	<p>The three centres are currently closed due to the pandemic and support is being provided by staff through alternative means. We are proposing discussions to agree plans with service users and their families at review meetings over March and April. Transition to new arrangements would then start and each plan will be individual to the person concerned. Section 3.7.4 of the report describes the transitional support available to people including a proposed transitions support worker for Pritchard's Road service users.</p> <p>It should also be noted that the staff redeployment period is until 27 July 2021 and the expectation is that whilst staff are redeployees, they will continue to provide support to service users as and when needed. Support could be via home visits or phone calls, mirroring the way support has been provided through lockdown.</p> <p>The three centres would not reopen following the easing of lockdown restrictions. Any change to the timescales would have a significant adverse impact on the budgetary position for adult social care and cause a prolonged period of uncertainty for service users following lockdown.</p>
<p>2. What research has been undertaken that breaks down of Physical Disability Day Opportunities users' ability to organise their own day support through a direct payment?</p>	<p>Direct payments (established in adult social care since 1997) can be made accessible to the vast majority of adult social care users with the right support. Experience has shown that this option can increase choice and control for individuals who need care and</p>

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	<p>support and be a very positive option in maximising independence. Support is available for anyone who is interested in pursuing this option. Around 20% of people who use adult social care in Tower Hamlets currently use direct payments.</p> <p>Review meetings with Physical Disability Day Opportunities service users are due to start in March. Part of the purpose of these will be to discuss who is interested in a direct payment and what support they might need. Section 3.7.21-4 of the report provides more information on direct payment take-up levels and the support available with this.</p>
<p>3. Have government grants been investigated as a funding stream for Physical Disability Day Opportunities provision and if so, please could you provide a list of which grants have been reviewed?</p>	<p>Day centres are non-statutory provision and there are no specific grants that can be separately applied for to fund this type of provision – the services are funded by General Fund.</p> <p>Should appropriate grants become available in the future, a bid could be made to enhance the model of day support and the hub provision.</p>
<p>4. Considering we are currently in a mental health crisis, has the impact of closing Pritchard’s Road day centre been assessed for users with mental health needs?</p>	<p>Yes, the report describes what service users say the impact of the pandemic has been on their mental health and wellbeing (see section 3.6.34-8 of the report), how we have supported Pritchard’s Road service users to date through this time (see section 3.1.15) and how we intend to support service users going forward. This includes how we plan to mitigate any potential negative impacts on mental health.</p>
<p>5. 3.7.15 states: “To start to transform services into community support hubs, we will initially run three projects from the community support hub starting from May 2021 at the latest10. These are based on the consultation results and Toynbee Hall co</p>	<p>Yes. The report has been developed with an awareness of changes to wider provision. The report doesn’t go into detail on what the community access project will involve (e.g. what Idea Stores or leisure centres, what activities, what days and times) as</p>

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<p>production work. These projects will be: 1. Community access: Facilitating visits to local Idea Stores, leisure centres and Linkage Plus centres to take part in activities” Has the full impact of reduced hours on the library & Ideas Stores and leisure centres been factored into the risk for the above provision.</p>	<p>the detail will be developed in partnership with service users and carers.</p>
<p>6. What agreements are in place to confirm that Independent Living Services – London, are London Living Wage employers?</p>	<p>People Plus run the Independent Living Service in Tower Hamlets for people with a direct payment. People Plus do not directly employ Personal Assistants or care workers, but rather support service users to do this directly.</p> <p>Direct payments to employ Personal Assistants cover London Living Wage to encourage pay at this level. A homecare agency that is not commissioned by the Council and purchased via a direct payment may not pay their care workers London Living Wage, though direct payment recipients are advised to consider this when choosing a home care agency. London Living Wage is a requirement in all our contracts, so this includes support staff directly employed by People Plus.</p>

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6.3 Bow bus gateway and timed closures exemptions considerations

1. Given that the High Court ruled that Transport for London's "Streetspace" plan treated London's taxi drivers unlawfully why do they remain excluded from bus gates (only allowed through if carrying a Bow based taxi card holder)?

There are numerous differences between the Streetspace scheme implemented by TfL and that which is presented within the Bow report, which it is important to understand. These are two very different traffic schemes. Differences include but not limited to the fact that all areas are accessible to taxis and other motor vehicles in Bow (in contrast in the "Streetspace" plan no taxis were permitted on a 0.4Km stretch of road); Tredegar Road and Old Ford Road are not key arterial A-roads unlike the A10 in the streetspace scheme ; and consideration has been given in the Bow scheme to the status of Taxis for accessible transport, with an exemption for Taxicard users. We also note that the "Streetspace" decision is under appeal.

The Bow scheme is being put forward in the shadow of a climate emergency and where children walk to and from school along Tredegar Road where levels of pollution are consistently higher than the national objective level of 40 µg m-3. This level of pollution is harmful and we know from other studies that children's lungs in Tower Hamlets are up to 10% smaller than average.

We have assessed our public sector equality duty in relation to proposals. As part of this we have recognised that licensed taxis do play a pivotal role in the transport system, especially given that it is obligatory for all vehicles to be fully accessible for wheelchair users.

In the Bow public consultation, a bus gate with 24/7 hours of operation was supported by the majority of respondents, and despite this, we have made amendments to the scheme in order

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	<p>to satisfy the needs of other members of the community, for example, those who need to use a vehicle or taxi to get around. Through our review and identification of groups likely to be impacted we have still further provided exemptions to the scheme such as for those with Taxicards limiting the impact on those using taxis as a form of accessible transport.</p>
<p>2. What will the air quality impact be on surrounding areas from diverted traffic?</p>	<p>Motor vehicle traffic that use an alternative route will be diverted on the main distributor routes such as the A11 and A12. These are designed to carry through traffic to reach longer distance destinations with greater capacity. These roads very often include wider footways and space between other road users and motor vehicles such as cycle lanes. In contrast, roads such as Tredegar Road have very narrow pavements and limited protection from vehicles both in terms of road safety and pollution levels.</p> <p>As part of the liveable streets proposals to be put to Cabinet today is a review of the scheme and air quality is a key factor that will be reviewed both internally and externally to the scheme area.</p>
<p>3. Given that the EqIA does now make clear that LTNs have a negative impact on the elderly why did we not allow a blanket exemption for the elderly to use the bus gates rather than restrict it only to those with carers and blue badges?</p>	<p>The EqIA identifies that those that have mobility issues and must use a motor vehicle will be negatively impacted. It is likely that this would be seen more in the elderly as a group but is not limited to this group. Therefore, the exemptions have been developed to meet the needs of those that would be more likely to</p>

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	benefit significantly from an exemption rather than a blanket across one group.
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6.7 Report on the outcome of the statutory consultation on the proposal to close The Cherry Trees Special School	
1. Proposal to close Cherry Trees School - this is the second recent closure that has been precipitated by a decline in quality and falling rolls (Rainey being the other). What assurances can be given that the Authority is acting quickly to support struggling schools.	The Local Authority is developing its plan to bring strategic clarity and coherence to the local education system, building on the earlier school organisation work of the primary review and working closely with school leaders and its school improvement partner (THEP) to facilitate and foster a shared, system-level approach to school improvement and sustainability. This includes providing earlier and targeted support to schools that are underperforming and/or planning for reductions in funding caused by falling pupil rolls.
2. Cherry Trees site - is there any update on proposed uses of the Cherry Trees site?	The decision to close Cherry Trees has not yet been taken and so it would be too early to set out any plans for proposed use of the site. If the council does decide to close the school, then officers are ready to progress a review to determine the options for the short and long term use of the Cherry Trees accommodation. An update will be provided later this year.
3. Bowden House/Ben Jonson - assuming the closure of Cherry Trees goes ahead, what are the contingencies if the necessary works are delayed at Bowden House? Given the ongoing pandemic situation, it's not infeasible that works might be delayed.	Any delay to the building improvement works being undertaken at Ben Jonson will not prevent the new provision operating from September. With the small number of pupils moving from Cherry Trees and the existing facilities on site, these children can still be accommodated safely with their Education and Health Care needs being fully met.
4. General question regarding school closure consultations where responses to statutory consultations are very low or non-existent, does this give rise to any requirement to reopen the consultation. What assurances can be given that the low response rates are because of the pandemic? Were all respondents to the first consultations targeted for the second, statutory consultation?	Stakeholder engagement on these proposals has been carefully undertaken over an extended timeframe and adopting a proportionate and targeted approach, in line with central government consultation principles and in recognition of the 'socially distanced' requirements of the pandemic. Although the formal public response has been very low it is evident that the variety of consultation methods used has enabled a high level of engagement with key stakeholders, particularly with the families and staff. It is also evident that the school and its wider community understood the full nature and possible outcomes from these proposals. Given these circumstances it was not necessary to extend or reopen the public consultation to illicit formal responses to the statutory notices.
6.9 Report on the outcome of public representations received in response to the statutory proposal to close St Matthias Primary School: Decision on Closure of St Matthias Primary School.	
1. This will mean Christ Church C of E Primary School, Brick Lane will be the nearest CoE primary school but in a small constrained site and part of whose playground is in dispute, would it not be better to keep the St Matthias site and move the Christchurch school as that has more space if the school does ever needs to expand again, that would open up Christ Church for other public use?	The St Matthias School site is owned by the London Diocesan Board for Schools, so suggestions for its future use is a matter for the Diocese. At present the DfE requirements are that the site must continue to be used for education and community purposes. The Diocese will therefore have the option to consider whether the vacant site should be taken over by an existing school(s).

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6.12 Budget Monitoring Report 2020-21 as at 31 December 2020 (Period 9)

1. Regarding the Council Budget Monitoring Report as at 31st December 2020-21: could a full breakdown of the additional staffing costs relating to the Tower Rewards implementation be provided?

The 2020-21 part year effect forecast costs of the terms and conditions changes for each directorate are Children & Culture (£171k), Governance (£98k), Health, Adults & Community (£124k), Place (£327k) and Resources (£134k). This is based on current permanent and fixed term contract staff and is a part year effect in 2020-21 due to implementation during the year. Future years will be impacted by the full year effect and further incremental increases for staff not currently at the top spinal point of their grade.

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