

<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>24 May 2021</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of Sharon Godman Divisional Director Strategy, Policy and Performance</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan 2021-22</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Filuck Miah - Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate
Wards affected	All Wards

REASONS FOR URGENCY

The report was not published five clear days in advance of the meeting. This is due to the additional time required to review the report in order to provide the necessary clearances.

Executive Summary

This report summarises the Committee's work in reviewing the scrutiny function in Tower Hamlets and submits an Improvement Plan to implement a range of actions in 2021-22 to improve and enhance scrutiny.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the activity undertaken by the 2020-21 Overview and Scrutiny Committee to understand the strengths and weaknesses of scrutiny at Tower Hamlets: and
2. Agree to implement the draft Improvement Plan for 2021-22.
3. Agree for the Overview & Scrutiny Chair to make further amendments to the Improvement Plan

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This paper submits the Improvement Plan for 2021-22 and actions therein to improve and enhance the scrutiny function at Tower Hamlets.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Take no action - this is not recommended as there is a case for change as shown by the evidence collected in the Improvement Plan.

4. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 From March to April 2021, scrutiny officers ran a survey for scrutiny members, executive members, and non-executive members as part of a health check on scrutiny to help evaluate the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny for 2020-21, as well help to inform areas for improvement for the next municipal year. The survey was also sent to officers involved in scrutiny throughout the year, for their feedback.
- 3.2 OSC also held two away-days in April 2021 to reflect on the achievements of scrutiny over the municipal year, and to formulate improvements that could build upon scrutiny's success.
- 3.3 Both the survey and the away days formed the basis for the development of an Improvement Plan for 2021-22 (Attachment 1). The Improvement Plan suggests actions to implement in seven areas of the scrutiny function at Tower Hamlets:
- A. Aims & Objectives: All Members, officers, and residents in Tower Hamlets to understand the role of scrutiny and what it aims to achieve
 - B. Meeting Administration: All scrutiny meetings to be run in a professional and highly efficient way to enable effective scrutiny to take place
 - C. Work Programme: Develop and deliver a coordinated work programme across all scrutiny committees which supports the council to achieve its strategic objectives and reflects the concerns of residents
 - D. Represent residents and enable their concerns to inform Council decision making and policy development
 - E. Evidence gathering: Ensure a wide range of witnesses are engaged, and evidence researched, to allow Scrutiny to make informed and effective recommendations
 - F. Scrutiny improves outcomes and drives improvement in public services
 - G. Accountability & Culture: Nurture a culture of scrutiny and work closely with the Council's Cabinet Leads and Corporate Directors to encourage their buy-in and have open and honest conversations about performance, key issues and identify where scrutiny can add value

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Actions in the Improvement Plan 2021-22 seek to improve the operation and planning of scrutiny in Tower Hamlets, along with making scrutiny more accessible to residents and partners of the borough by raising awareness and seeking greater engagement and participation by the wider community.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 The actions in the attached Improvement Plan are made as part of the Committee's role in helping to secure continuous improvement for the council, as required under its Best Value duty.

5.3 The Committee has a mandatory consultation role on all items that are the responsibility of full Council as set out in the budget and policy framework.

5.4 Although likely to form part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, there are no direct environmental, risk management, crime reduction or safeguarding issues arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 This report suggests a number of actions in the draft Improvement Plan for 2021-22 to strengthen scrutiny arrangements in Tower Hamlets.

6.2 There are no direct financial implications to the Council from this report, however if the cost of actions carried out to implement improvements cannot be contained within the existing Council revenue budget, then growth funding will need to be requested for consideration as part of the medium term financial planning process.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 9 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area

or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions.

- 7.2 The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This is referred to as the Council's best value duty.
- 7.3 The recommendations to help strengthen scrutiny arrangements are consistent with both the Council's best value duty and its duties under Local Government Act 2000.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- Draft Improvement Plan 2021-22

Officer contact details for documents:

Filuck Miah - Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate

Daniel Kerr - Strategy and Policy Manager, Corporate

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RAG status	Missed target requires action	On target but with minor issues	Completed action
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A. Aims & Objectives: All Members, officers, and residents in Tower Hamlets to understand the role of scrutiny and what it aims to achieve

Objectives	Priority	Action	Owner(s)	Delivery	RAG	Comments
1. O&S has a clearly defined and valued role in the Council's improvement and governance arrangements and includes prioritising to ensure that the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority	Establish engagement dialogue between scrutiny leads with Cabinet portfolio holders and senior council officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each scrutiny lead to diarise quarterly meetings with relevant officers and Cabinet members 	Strategy & Policy officers	May/June 21		Needs to be ongoing on a regular basis each municipal year
	Create comms plan for Overview and Scrutiny's toolkit and public user guide and publicity of O&S meetings via to various comms channel	<p>What does this look like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video at away day for comms channels Publicise committee meetings via Council comms and partner channels Create channel mechanism to update and feedback to residents on activity, outcomes etc. Publicise one-off scrutiny review and challenge sessions Publicise scrutiny reports via social media channels – both comms and Members Build a high level one-page summary 	Strategy & Policy officers, Comms officers	Summer 21		Invite external comms lead to discuss best approach

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		<p>template for committee meeting activities i.e. topic discussed, KLE's actions/recs to inform residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members also to create interest via their social media feeds such as videos • Comms support to help resident engagement better with scrutiny – (options) 				
	Create separate plan for the publication of the Committees Work		Strategy and Policy officers in discussion with the Scrutiny Leads			
	Scrutiny to get involved earlier in policy development and pre-decision scrutiny	Use the 1-2-1 with Cabinet Member and officers to raise this as an item of discussion	Scrutiny Leads	May/June 2021		
2. O&S Members have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their roles effectively	<p>Establish an annual training package for Scrutiny Members to aid them with developing key skills required to fulfil their roles</p> <p>Include internal training options where possible such as briefing sessions for finance and audit, risk management, performance,</p> <p>Developing better understanding of financial and policy context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put likely briefing dates in diary • Need to undertake a skills audit of Scrutiny members to understand training needs and develop programme • Create training need matrix • Working with CfPS to ensure Members 	Strategy & Policy officers working closely with CD's DDs, HoS for service areas	Summer 21		<p>Target next municipal year for comprehensive training programme</p> <p>Available access Audit's training programme for Members</p> <p>Delivered briefing session induction, business rate reset</p>

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	<p>Members understanding the range of service areas within the portfolio</p> <p>Developing learning in key areas which will help strengthen scrutiny's role and impact</p>	<p>development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members induction with specific portfolio areas • Members undertaking site visits where applicable to develop their knowledge base • Source training to help understand Council finances i.e. Pensions Fund, Treasury, Management, Acquisitions & Disposals, Budget Setting, Councils Reserves & Outturn Monitoring, and Risk Management 				<p>and strategic plan</p>
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B. Meeting Administration: All scrutiny meetings to be run in a professional and highly efficient way to enable effective scrutiny to take place

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<p>3. O&S meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it</p>	<p>Scrutiny chairs delegating to committee members to take on a more active role for the next scrutiny meeting topic leading to better engagement and ownership from members and more robust research and evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny members to meet informally once a month to discuss priorities for committee agendas and report development 	<p>O&S Chair and Scrutiny Leads</p>	<p>Monthly from Summer 21</p>		<p>To review approach at scrutiny away day – reflection/ improvements Timing needs to be found</p>
	<p>All papers to be shared with Members (a week in advance of the committee meeting) to allow Members sufficient time to review the papers and establish key lines of enquiry for the item.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and themes to be requested at beginning of calendar month before committee • Have the information well before the meeting so that they are well prepared what needs to be asked and what needs to be done. • Committees could use more case studies and open to more community members and group involvement. • Scrutinise decisions based on clear set of factors e.g., finances, risk, impact, • Scoping out agenda items for committee meetings to help better use of time / questioning with more focus and purpose. • Members raising residents concern at 	<p>Divisional Directors and or Heads of Service, Strategy & Policy officers</p>	<p>Jan 2021</p>		<p>Further review as part of the planning process for next municipal year</p>

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		<p>Committee meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance between officers/ Members given sufficient time to present on massive issues 				
	Improve focus of pre-meets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To have a pre- agenda template for discussion at pre-meets to help focus and perform better at meetings 	Scrutiny leads			
	Improve scope to include case studies, external organisations, hearing from residents and or local groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply a stakeholder mapping within scope of the agenda items to ensure that the relevant people are attending the meeting. 	Scrutiny leads in liaison with Strategy & Policy officers	May 2021 onwards		

C. Work Programme: Develop and deliver a coordinated work programme across all scrutiny committees which supports the council to achieve its strategic objectives and reflects the concerns of residents

4.	O&S Committee and it's sub-committees develop a work programme, focusing on priority areas including:	Scrutiny support to assist scrutiny members with research and analysis on progress made over the last year including	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each committee and sub-committee meeting to have one area of spotlight or 	Strategy & Policy officers	May 2021		To be programmed in for next municipal year (2021-22) as part of O&S work
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement agenda Delivering the strategic plan Linking performance and budget scrutiny 	<p>timetabling in service action plans to come back to scrutiny as part of the work programme</p>	<p>challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge sessions are diarised at beginning of municipal year at various intervals (rather than just the end) 				programme	
	<p>Reduce volume of agenda items at committee meetings and help address limited committee meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase number of one-off challenge session to provide coverage on issues that warrant more detailed examination. 	<p>Strategy & Policy officers in liaison with scrutiny leads</p>	<p>May/ June 2021</p>			
	<p>O&S Work Programme (post committee sign off) to be circulated out to directorates as part of supporting directorate forward planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include likely Challenge sessions as they are confirmed 	<p>Strategy & Policy officers</p>	<p>May 2021</p>			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To programme into O&S forward plan – review of service action plans based on challenge session recs. 	<p>Strategy & Policy officers in liaison with scrutiny leads</p>	<p>May/ June 2021</p>			
	<p>Improving Committees focus on issues – better forward planning (looking at topics earlier)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To programme in O&S forward plan less agenda items to facilitate in depth focus on issues which are more thematic in nature Engage DLT in work programme setting now before new 	<p>Scrutiny leads with support from scrutiny network</p>	<p>May/June 2021</p>			

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committees comes in so we have items 				
	Reduce gaps between sub-committee meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To programme into O&S forward plan more-subcommittee meetings earlier in the scrutiny year 	Strategy & Policy officers in liaison with Democratic Services and Scrutiny leads	May/ June 2021		
	Combination of Spotlight and Challenge Session to facilitate in-depth focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application of a light touch spotlight session on issue and follow up a more in-depth focus using scrutiny review/ challenge session. 	Strategy & Policy offices in liaison with Scrutiny leads	May/ June 2021		
	Raising residents awareness on facility to ask questions on topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase level of comms to residents making them aware opportunity to ask questions on specific topics Using council comm tech such as SLIDO to help real-time (Interactive) questions from residents 				<p>Challenge - how topics and content information is shared with the public to help facilitate questions</p> <p>Needs to be carefully and selectively used for sessions.</p>
D. Represent residents and enable their concerns to inform Council decision making and policy development						
5. Promote opportunities for resident to engage with scrutiny meetings	Develop a comms plan that publicises the OSC and its sub-committee meetings offering residents participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build comms actions into work programme and Action Log e.g. committee member to create video requesting info before 	O&S chair, Scrutiny Leads, Strategy & policy officers, Comms	May 2021		To be programmed in for next municipal year (2021-22) as part of O&S work programme

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge session Programme meetings in the community if possible and dependent on work programme 	officers			
	Promote council's online scrutiny suggestion of topics page annually along with the scrutiny mailbox as part of the wider scrutiny comms plan			from May 2021		To review and discuss with comms lead
	One-off resident led scrutiny topic (based on resident poll as key issue) within the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny leads to consider where this could have best impact within their forward plan and how residents can be engaged with the session (possibly challenge session) 	Scrutiny leads in liaison with strategy & policy officers and Democratic services			To be considered when developing work programme
	Incorporate resident questions section within the committee meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny leads to ensure that the questions are received by a set time and programmed into the session at beginning or the end. 				
E. Evidence gathering: Ensure a wide range of witnesses are engaged, and evidence researched, to allow Scrutiny to make informed and effective recommendations						
6. council explores where 'independent expertise' exists in the borough, taking account of existing networks and	Build opportunities for community members and stakeholders to give evidence at meetings and assist with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request relevant community and stakeholder contacts from Directorates and 	O&S Chair, Scrutiny Leads and Strategy &	from May 2021		

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contacts, and how this could be used to assist independent scrutiny of services.	evidence gathering	<p>Scrutiny Leads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote online Scrutiny engagement portals 	Policy officers			
	<p>Consider benchmarking with neighbouring or similar sized authorities to understand their approach including inviting scrutiny chairs from different authorities.</p> <p>Scrutiny Leads to be integrated into council's partnership working (thematic boards)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief exercise comparing to other authorities Relevant partnership boards and opportunities identified Scrutiny leads invited to attend as appropriate Scrutiny Members Undertake site visit (where feasible and relevant) as part of developing intelligence for Committee meeting agenda 	O&S Chair, Scrutiny Leads and Strategy & Policy officers	from May 2021		
	Distribution of scrutiny agenda items amongst scrutiny member to help more in-depth focus of meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny Leads to spread agenda topics amongst Members to help sharpen the focus/ examination of the topic 	O&S Chair and Scrutiny Leads	May/June 2021 onwards		
	Reviewing the Cabinet Forward Plan to identify any controversial issues which need scrutiny's attention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny leads need to more investigative approach with Cabinet members and officers on these topics via 1-2-1 				Challenge – timing - release of Cabinet forward plan i.e. 30 days prior to decision
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee to review the experience of the 				Feedback from CLT

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		borough from a Place wide perspective – branch out beyond the Council				
F. Scrutiny improves outcomes and drives improvement in public services						
Scrutiny Self Reflection on its work for 2020-21	To continue review using feedback surveys and capture the views Members, Co-optees, partners and officer feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement Plan published. Reviewed informally throughout the year 	Strategy & Policy officers	March 22		
Reviewing Service Action Plans		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To work programme in service action plans to confirm what's been delivered and if it needs to be called back in. 6 months check back Committee to improve the challenge for performance measures against the plan – ensure the officer is required to comeback with a better explanation next meeting 	Scrutiny leads in liaison with Strategy & Policy officers	May/Jun 2021		
G. Accountability & Culture: Nurture a culture of scrutiny and work closely with the Council's Cabinet Leads and Corporate Directors to encourage their buy-in and have open and honest conversations about performance, key issues and identify where scrutiny can add value						
7. Managing disagreement – Cultivating the relationship between Scrutiny Members and Executive	Develop an executive and scrutiny protocol which creates an expectations framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capture expectations of information when requested by committee i.e. timely, 	O&S Chair / Scrutiny Leads, SSO and Strategy	TBC		To be explored for next municipal year 2021-22

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> topical Capture expectation of members focus at meetings 	and Policy officers			
8. Improving relations	<p>Scrutiny's relationship with Cabinet and officers</p> <p>Scrutiny's relationship with external partner organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect on all side whilst maintaining critical friend approach and taking a collaborative approach ensuring scrutiny adds value, has systematic focus upon what residents and service users are saying Scrutiny's to establish approach to controversial issues and establishing rapport for a more open and honest dialogue Developing a parity of esteem so that O&S function has equal weighting to that of executive. Be honest and upfront with partner organisations invited to scrutiny meetings - let them know that scrutiny will challenge 	<p>Scrutiny leads</p> <p>Scrutiny leads</p> <p>O&S Chair and SSO</p> <p>Scrutiny leads</p>			

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		<p>on what they bring to the meetings and what they say at the meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get buy-in from every level of the Council is needed for Overview and Scrutiny to function fully. The culture of O&S is key here, and a substantial shift needs to take place at an organisational level. 	O&S chair, SSO			
9. Improving scrutiny's representation	Improving No of opposition Members on Scrutiny Committees		Members to review at the AGM			Current Opposition Members feel it's a challenge to look at issue in-depth when covering so many areas.
Improving Council's engagement with Scrutiny	Facilitation better transparency on agenda issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSC and its sub-committees to encourage council services to bring areas of concern to the committee so that work can be undertaken to review and add value to workstreams Ensuring that the right officer is in place to provide response on 				

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		cross cutting topics such as the budget – to provide better accountability.				
	Create scope for Scrutiny Members to participate at boards and panel groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map our relevant partnership boards Scrutiny Leads to be invited 	Scrutiny Leads and Strategy & Policy officers			To be explored for next municipal year 2021-22
	Clarity on decision making process and openness from departments to share in a timely and regular manner	<p>Scrutiny to request documents such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Situation reports – prepared by the council departments and by partners Public health updates - specific reports on the spread of the disease and mitigation and suppression measures Action trackers – service by service, and corporately 				
	Escalation mechanism for risk issues to council statutory officers Head of Paid Service, Monitoring officer S151 officer	Scrutiny to red flag where it identifies clear risk to the council on issues identified within the committee meetings as a support mechanism for governance.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer in liaison with O&S committee chair			