

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.31 P.M. ON MONDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2022

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

Members Present:

Councillor Mohammed Pappu (Chair)

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| Councillor Bex White (Vice-Chair) | – Scrutiny Lead for Children and Education |
| Councillor Faroque Ahmed | – Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety |
| Councillor Marc Francis | |
| 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-Optee

Other Councillors Present:

Mayor John Biggs
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Eve McQuillan

Officers Present:

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| Marcus Barnett | – Detective Chief Superintendent - MPS Central East Borough Command Unit |
| Ann Corbett | – (Director, Community Safety) |
| Keith Daley | – Interim Head Substance Misuse |
| Charles Griggs | – Head of Community Safety |
| Keith Stanger | – (Head of Safer Neighbourhood Operations) |
| Nisar Visram | – (Director of Finance, Procurement & Audit) |
| Allister Bannin | – (Head of Strategic and Corporate Finance) |
| Afazul Hoque | – (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy) |
| David Knight | – (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance) |
| Filuck Miah | – (Strategy and Policy Officer, |

Corporate Strategy and Policy
Team)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

- I. Councillor Marc Francis due to his wife Councillor Rachel Blake being the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing.

2. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil Items

3. CHAIRS UPDATE

Noted.

4. ACTION LOG

Noted.

5. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13/12/2021

The Committee confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13/12/2021.

5.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24/01/2022

The Committee confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24/01/2022.

6. COMMUNITY SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

6.1 Community Safety Spotlight with Cabinet Member and Borough Commander

The Committee received and commented on a presentation on the progress of community safety priorities including tackling serious youth violence.

The Committee:

- ❖ **Agreed** that women felt most unsafe when alone and no one should fear being alone or accepting this situation as normal.
- ❖ **Agreed** on the importance to actively promote women's night safety and help to make more women and girls to feel confident around Tower Hamlets after dark. Therefore, women and girls need to know what to

do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling; encouraging reporting by victims and bystanders; offering training to ensure that all who report are believed; and designing public spaces and workplaces to make them feel safer at night as well as shining a light on those areas where there is still a need to do more work.

- ❖ **Agreed** that recent events has highlighted these concerns and that the fear of women and girls is not irrational. It comes from a deep acknowledgment that women in the community do not feel safe and addressing the misogyny is necessary.
- ❖ **Acknowledged** the grave levels of public concern following a number of deeply troubling incidents and allegations. It was felt that the bond of trust between residents and the Metropolitan MPS Service (MPS) locally as well as corporately has been broken.
- ❖ **Stated** that they were committed to collaborating with Detective Chief Superintendent Marcus Barnett and his Team to rebuild the trust and confidence of Borough's communities in the Metropolitan MPS Service.
- ❖ **Recognised** that the Borough has huge numbers of wonderfully professional officers and staff but recognised the actions of some are of serious concern and fall far below the high standards of the Metropolitan MPS Service.
- ❖ As **mentioned** above wished with work with the Detective Chief Superintendent Barnett and his Team to rebuild trust, raise standards, and ensure the Boroughs MPS Officers work in a positive, supportive, and healthy culture that sets an example for others to follow.
- ❖ **Noted** that **(i)** many residents particularly in Limehouse have told the MPS that antisocial behaviour linked to the use of nitrous oxide, otherwise known as laughing gas, is a significant concern, **(ii)** the (MPS) and its partner agencies have received complaints that it can be intimidating seeing groups of people taking it; and **(iii)** nitrous oxide causes a noise nuisance and the small metal canisters that hold it are often left on the floor as litter, which creates a mess on the Boroughs streets.
- ❖ **Noted** that women are constantly worried about their safety when walking at night, walking to their car at night, using an elevator or stairwell in public spaces, taking public transportation, or traveling.
- ❖ **Agreed** that the (MPS) locally as well as corporately should **(i)** ensure that the way they deal with violence against women and girls needs to be effective and as assertive as it can be and **(ii)** make sure that allegations are being thoroughly investigated.
- ❖ Was please to **noted** that **(i)** the locally as well as corporately clearly understood what has happened and what action needs to be taken, and **(ii)** has the absolute determination to do what is necessary to start rebuilding the trust that has been lost.
- ❖ **Welcomed** the knowledge that the (MPS) locally as well as corporately recognises that it has to be listening to the communities in Tower Hamlets that they seek to serve, to give residents the confidence that if they report an incident something will happen, and they will be taken seriously.
- ❖ **Noted** that the (MPS) locally as well as corporately are running a significant campaign on inclusion, diversity, equality throughout the

organization to talk about and to increase levels of standards. Understanding what officers and staff need to know in terms of the (MPS) values, the code of ethics, what is expected of officers on duty and off duty as this is a job like no other, officers have to work to a higher standard which is the public expects.

- ❖ **Welcomed** the ongoing dialogue within the (MPS) locally as well as corporately with Female, Black Asian Minority Ethnic; and Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning) LGBTQQ+ officers looking at everything from policy process, fair working practices, and making sure that the MPS is a safe place to work and to have a zero tolerance to inappropriate behaviour, criminal acts, and ensuring that those people leave the organization (**e.g.**, address misogyny, sexism, and racism within the MPS).
- ❖ **Agreed** that crime and antisocial behaviour are a top concern for residents and wanted to see the Council to work ever more closely with the MPS to increase high-visibility patrols and target criminals, but also to make sure people can access support when they need it.
- ❖ **Noted** the MPS are working very closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.
- ❖ **Accepted** that there are many resolute people in the MPS and CPS who were unwavering in their efforts to do the right thing for victims of crime often in difficult and challenging circumstances.
- ❖ **Hoped** that this commitment and resolve to make improvements are to be commended and are worthy of note. However, Members felt that there needs to be a profound, and fundamental shift in how cases are investigated and prosecuted, as currently this is having a significant impact on victims of crime.
- ❖ **Noted** that whilst within the current judicial legal framework it can take several months to investigate a really serious crime and gather the required forensic evidence. There is work ongoing to improve the process from all agencies working within the judicial process.
- ❖ **Noted** that within Tower Hamlets there are some of the best detection rates across London around drugs, domestic abuse, hate crime, rape; sexual, knife crime and people who have been stabbed but not murdered.
- ❖ **Agreed** the MPS locally as well as corporately have got work to rebuild trust and confidence as policing by consent has continuing relevance to present day policing because it marks out an important way in which officers can fulfil their core mission.
- ❖ **Agreed** that by thinking broadly in terms of 'institutional trust,' it is possible to demonstrate that, by improving public perceptions it will enhance the legitimacy of the MPS which will help in its efforts to reduce crime.
- ❖ **Agreed** that local policing needs to remain at the heart of the work that the MPS does locally as well as corporately and the dedicated Ward Officers are known to and part of the communities they serve and strong links with the communities are vital to help the MPS gather intelligence, detect crime, and retain the confidence of Londoners. In

addition, high visibility patrols in the Borough various wards provide reassurance in those particular locations.

- ❖ **Noted** with concern that **(i)** women do not feel confident in coming forward to statutory agencies to report offences, **(ii)** the sanction detection rate in the past four years for domestic abuse and sexual offences has been at an all-time low, **(iii)** actually going through the court process is really, really difficult for victims of sexual abuse and domestic abuse as they have got to relive what has happened to them.
- ❖ **Agreed** that having independent domestic abuse support workers is really key, as well as independent sexual violence advisors to support victims through the court process.
- ❖ **Agreed** that where women do feel unsafe in the Borough then resources should be deployed there.
- ❖ **Welcomed** the Councils close collaboration with dedicated Ward Officers to address the concerns of women who feel unsafe in particular wards.
- ❖ **Agreed** that developing male allyship is really important to create a culture of mutual respect and consideration has never been of more importance to ask men to change their behaviour rather than asking women to change theirs.
- ❖ **Agreed** that it is of important for the Police and the partners across both children and health services to tackle the crimes that cause most harm to children and young people **e.g.**, knife crime, gang-related crime, sexual exploitation, and serious youth violence. The approach to such crimes to focus on preventing crime, intervening with those already involved in criminal activity, and taking tough enforcement action against those who persist in breaking the law.
- ❖ **Noted** that the MPS Cadets have assisted with test purchasing visits in a joint operation with Tower Hamlets Council where they have visited various premises who are selling cigarettes and alcohol and those premises who failed to challenge the underage purchaser would face proceedings because they also failed a test purchase. The use of the MPS Cadets is very much dependent on their availability and subject to intelligence and activity that there are irresponsible licensees or license holders.
- ❖ **Noted** that County Lines is a drug supply business model, in relation to Class A, that in turn stimulates the activity within the middle market drugs supply linked to organised crime. The scale of the current complex threat posed by county lines in relation to the exploitation of children and other vulnerable persons to facilitate drug dealing is extensive and affects every police service area.
- ❖ **Noted** the Borough Command recently had a meeting with Kit Moorhouse (Minister of State for Crime and Policing) when he came to the Bethnal Green where officers presented to him the work that they are doing centrally around County Lines, and as part of a bid for more resource to dismantle some of those County Lines and more, importantly stop the harm to those young people who participate in this activity.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked all those attendees for their contributions to the discussions which had provided a good sense on the progress in regard to community safety priorities within the Borough.

7. SPOTLIGHT SESSION

7.1 Mayors Spotlight

The Chair introduced the main substantive item this evening and he thanked the Executive Mayor John Biggs and the Chief Executive Will Tuckley for, attending this evening's meeting and the key themes arising from the questioning on the presentation may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ **Noted** in regard to Covid that vaccines still remain the first line of defence to live with and manage the virus. Staff therefore are encouraged if they have not already, get their first, second or booster vaccine to protect themselves and others.
- ❖ Was **advised** that from the first week of February, all Council staff were advised that they are expected to be in at least one day a week for the first three weeks of February, and then from at least from February 21st at least two days a week.
- ❖ **Noted** that it is intended to keep in place socially distanced lifts, with capacity now at four people at a time. Whilst the cleaning and sanitising stations continue to be available and enhanced cleaning regimes remain in place.
- ❖ Was **informed** that staff will still be encouraged to conduct regular lateral flow tests (access the lateral flow testing sites at Mulberry Place and the Waste Services Depot). If staff should evaluate positive or are experiencing any symptoms of Covid-19, they must inform their line-manager that they can work from home if in line with service needs.
- ❖ **Noted** that the health and safety of all staff is the Council's top priority and to support the return of staff to keeping certain measures in place, including risk assessments, enhanced cleaning regimes, cleaning and sanitising stations, and socially distanced desks, lifts, and meeting rooms. In addition to that the Council are also requesting that staff should wear face coverings when entering, walking around buildings, in lifts and when meeting residents/customers.
- ❖ **Noted** subject to the relevant bylaw if you rent a garage from your Housing Provider as well as being used for the storage of taxed and roadworthy private motor vehicles, garages can also be used to store other vehicles including small commercial vehicles, bicycles tools and garden equipment.
- ❖ Was **informed** that as the first stage of Leisure Estate Investment Plan, the Council intended to replace the existing St George's Leisure Centre with a new 'wet/dry' leisure centre on the current site, subject to approval of the capital budget by Cabinet
- ❖ **Noted** that it is estimated this will cost £35m, while the initial allocation in the Council's 2022-23 Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial

Strategy 2022-25 report, considered separately at Cabinet or if desired through further scrutiny is for £25.163m, given the timescales for delivering the project. The existing St George's building is considered beyond its economic and design life, in a poor condition and with a limited range of facilities to meet the needs of residents in this vicinity, and in the wider context of the whole estate.

- ❖ **Noted** if no action were taken then St George's would remain closed and no alternative proposals in place for re-providing its capacity at John Orwell or any other site. The rest of the estate would not be improved in the short to medium term, so that only four pools would be available when York Hall's pool reopens. Residents in the Shadwell and Wapping area would need to continue to travel to Poplar Baths, Mile End or York Hall to swim in a Council-owned leisure centre. Although interim measures are in place to enable schools to meet the KS2 curriculum swimming requirement, it would obviously be more convenient to have local pool access.
- ❖ **Noted** that regard to street services whilst Public Realm is working hard to ensure that there are minimal disruptions to the service recruitment and retention within the service is still sensitive to Covid-19 and other related issues (**e.g.**, shortages in the labour market). There is a specific ongoing risk of HGV driver shortage (linked to national shortages). In addition, shortages in drivers means that you lose that knowledge of the various routes. It has proved to be a considerable difficulty is in relation to drivers, LBTH currently have 10 agency drivers and then 37 other operatives to assist with the with the process. However, it remains an ongoing challenge to ensure that there are enough drivers/operatives
- ❖ **Noted** that there is a need for additional supervisory staff to deliver the service as there are currently insufficient number of supervisor, prolonged sickness of management staff.
- ❖ **Noted** the issues relating to Brexit **e.g.**, supply change issues- resulting in shortage of bins and vehicle parts.
- ❖ **Considered** the advantages and disadvantages to using underground waste storage systems. One of the main advantages of in effect hiding the waste underground is that reduces any potential disturbances to residents by reducing the potential noise impact from residents rolling bins back and forth, and through a reduction in odour as the waste is enclosed underground. Although the design of Underground Refuse Systems (URS) means that the refuse vehicles they do not have the capacity to collect wheeled bins or require the procurement of a specialist vehicle specifically designed for the purpose.
- ❖ **Noted** that the Council currently has a number of URS Vehicles these vehicles have cranes on top of them to lift up the URS units. These cranes are very specialists with many moving parts, and they have to lift 30 bins every single day per vehicle which means that there is bound to be a lot of stress on each crane. Therefore, the Service has increased the frequency from a three month to a monthly regime of maintenance to ensure that that they can have these vehicles deployed on a day-to-day basis.

- ❖ **Noted** in regard to the patterns of waste across the Borough the Council are remapping the whole of Tower Hamlets both in terms of the routes, volumes, and tonnage of waste.
- ❖ **Commented** that the Young People Service (YPS) was not being as effective as it could be and therefore should be subject of further scrutiny **e.g.**, expand the offer to young people; the commissioning of services for the for the detached youth; develop the range of activities available at youth hubs in Tower Hamlets; improving the offer for the LGBTQI and the disability provision.
- ❖ **Noted** that Tower Hamlets is working closely with a number of employers within a range of sectors including construction, creative arts, digital media, hospitality and catering and fitness to try and prevent young people in a difficult job market from becoming reliant on Universal Credit over the long term. This scheme called Kickstart aims to do this by creating new six-month job placements for those aged between 16-24 who currently receive Universal Credit and are at risk of long-term unemployment and LBTH is ahead of most local authorities. However, the Council needs to provide additional catch-up support for young people who might have got behind with their skills and employability.
- ❖ **Agreed** that there should be detailed consideration on unemployed young people locally to establish the unemployment picture across the Borough historically, before analysing the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on youth unemployment in the Borough.
- ❖ **Acknowledged** that unemployment is a difficult experience, financially and emotionally, regardless of a person's age. However, it is particularly damaging for young people especially their mental and physical health can be negatively affected, both now and in the future as unemployment increases susceptibility to illness, mental stress, and loss of self-esteem leading to depression. Therefore, the (YPS) needs to provide not only nourishing youth activities for people who are motivated and really want to move forward but also services which supports people who might be at risk of disengagement and might have safeguarding concerns around them.
- ❖ **Agreed** that those young people who **(i)** have not prospered in their education; **(ii)** have made difficult choices; **(iii)** have had their education dislocated for personal reasons need support.
- ❖ **Agreed** that a good YPS is one that works to address unemployment and help young people to reach their full potential.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked all those attendees for their contributions to the discussions which had provided a good sense on the progress in regard to strategic performance and delivery.

8. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Committee received and noted the updates that had been received from Scrutiny Leads in regard to their portfolio's.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Following comments by the Committee the Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions (PDSQ) Members **agreed** the particular questions/recommendations that they wanted to raise with Cabinet on the 9th of February 2022 (**See attached appendix**).

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

Nil items

11. 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.

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

Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.17 p.m.

**Chair, Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**