

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Mohammed Pappu	
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Leema Qureshi	Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance
Councillor Andrew Wood	

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Denise Jones

Other Councillors In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Asma Begum	(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children, Youth Services, Education and Equalities (Statutory Deputy Mayor)
Mayor John Biggs	(Executive Mayor)
Councillor Candida Ronald	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector)

Co-optees Present in Person:

Halima Islam	Co-Optee
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Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Kevin Bartle	(Corporate Director, Resources & Section 151 Officer)
Susannah Beasley-Murray	(Divisional Director of Supporting Families)
Thorsten Dreyer	(Corporate Head of Strategy & Improvement)
Kelly Duggan	HOS Youth Justice & Young People's Service • LBTH - Children's Services
Sharon Godman	(Director, Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Manager)
Ahsan Khan	(Chief Accountant)
David Knight	(Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)

Filuck Miah	(Strategy and Policy Officer, Strategy, Improvement and Transformation Service)
James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children and Culture)
Denise Radley	(Corporate Director, Health, Adults & Community)
Ann Sutcliffe	(Corporate Director, Place)
Will Tuckley	(Chief Executive)
Nisar Visram	(Director of Finance, Procurement & Audit)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

The following Member for transparency declared a potential interest in relation to:

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

2. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

2.1 7th February 2022

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th February 2022 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

2.2 14th February 2022

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th February 2022 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

2.3 21st February 2022.

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

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21st February 2022 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

4. ACTION LOG

Noted

5. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

The Committee **noted** Cabinet forward plan as of 11th January 2022 and that for the most up to date version, Members were recommended to check the Cabinet web pages on the [council's website](#).

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil Items.

7. CABINET SPOTLIGHT

7.1 Youth Services

The Committee received a presentation that provided a spotlight on the Council's Youth Justice and Young People's Services which included **(i)** details on what has happened since youth services provision has been commissioned; **(ii)** progress made to date; **(iii)** how the challenges have been managed and moving forward how will this improve provision; and **(iv)** what targets have been set for the provision and how it will be monitored. The main points arising from the questioning on the presentation is summarised as follows:

- ❖ **Noted** that the model of delivery for youth services has changed and the Borough has now commissioned 10 universal centre-based youth centres, 4 specialist's youth provisions for specific cohorts of young people and 5 Detached youth provisions to support and engage young people on their territory (streets, parks, open & shared public spaces) where participation is voluntary. These council commissioned youth centres work jointly with Youth Justice service in supporting young people as part of their step-down process to re-engaging in Targeted or Universal services and encouraging user voice through participative activities such as the youth Council.
- ❖ **Noted** that the newly commissioned services are now beginning to bed in and be able to prove impact. The Council have held the first Youth Providers Forum since the award of the last contracts and all providers are very engaged in the new model moving forward – particularly in sharing good practice and working together to tackle issues.
- ❖ **Noted** that a bid has been submitted for growth funding and discussions are being held about building collaboration to deliver

training to the wider network and how to share this with minimal cost implications.

- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH has been clear with the providers that they will be checked in terms of quality and the impact that this has had on young people's lives and indeed on Community cohesion.
- ❖ **Agreed** that it is not just about the commissioning relationship, but it is about the ongoing development of working collaboratively and sharing best practice.
- ❖ **Noted** that the commissioning approach was undertaken in a way that ensured that all local providers were fully informed about the Council's approach.
- ❖ **Understood** that LBTH are speaking to the providers about introducing a shared database as it is felt to be a more convenient means of exchanging data than file transfer as it allows for immediate updates and can be used to assert a common data system.
- ❖ **Noted** that should a young person have no recourse to public funds, the law does not give them the right to financial or other forms of support from government agencies, except in cases where a young person's human rights under the Human Rights Act may be violated.
- ❖ **Understood** that Tower Hamlets Council aims to ensure that where young are entitled to assistance either under the HRA or under other legislation – this will be provided. They are guaranteed that they will be listened to, and their concerns will be taken seriously. However, LBTH also needs to act within the law so if the Council is unable to help them further, the young person will be pointed towards other organisations which may be able to do so.
- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH are working to ensure that all the young people are getting fair access and that the Council are sharing information about all the different organizations that are out there to ensure that LBTH is matching young people to the right services at the right time.
- ❖ **Commented** that whilst the information on the quality of work being undertaken with young people who are engaged with the with the Council's and the commissioned youth centres is very helpful. It was felt that they as a committee had not really been given the desired level of assurance with regard to the youth provision (**e.g.**, Eastside Youth or Minerva Community Centre's) and would wish to see actual performance data and **asked** that such data should be made available as soon as possible.
- ❖ **Indicated** that they would wish to see evidence of the quality of work being undertaken by providers towards supporting young people to take ownership of their own lives as it was felt really important to know whether things are getting better or not.
- ❖ **Commented** that under the Social Value Act commissioning authorities need to give consideration at the pre-procurement stage to **(i)** how what is to be obtained will improve the social, environmental, and economic well-being of the relevant area over and above the core delivery of a contract; and **(ii)** how any such improvement might be secured.
- ❖ Was pleased to **note** that Council's Youth Justice and Young People's Services would be very happy to look again at what assurance they

can be provided with in regard to those young people who are asylum seekers and have no recourse to public funds together with what data can be provided on that, along with the other data that the committee has asked.

- ❖ **Noted** that with regard to those children and young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers LBTH is to offer trauma training to all the Borough's youth providers to ensure that they have the specialist knowledge to build sustainable relationships with children and young people.
- ❖ **Agreed** that Council's Youth Justice and Young People's Services needs to develop good quality youth provision that is available to all across the Borough through the eyes of as wide as a cross section of local children and young people.
- ❖ **Agreed** that youth development strategies should be aimed at all children and young people. The assumption is that creating supportive and enriching environments for all children and young people will lead to the desired positive outcomes as well as reduced negative outcomes. However, it was very important to blend universal approaches with approaches that are targeting all those children and young people facing extra challenges from across the Borough.
- ❖ **Agreed** that **(i)** the sharing best practice should be develop further; **(ii)** the Council's Youth Justice and Young People's Services should, ensure that providers are meeting the needs of the young people, **(iii)** young people should continue to be involved in the monitoring and the moulding of the youth offer so that their voice continues to be heard; and **(iv)** therefore ensuring that are at the forefront of what LBTH is delivering.
- ❖ **Agreed** that whilst effective youth work takes place in buildings as well as on the streets, considerable effort needs to go into creating an atmosphere in all youth venues which is stimulating, friendly and purposeful.
- ❖ **Noted** that these youth venues serve the dual purpose of accommodating unstructured social interaction among different age groups and supplying instructional classes all in a safe, supervised environment.
- ❖ **Accepted** that each venue needs to offer an extensive timetable of games, sports, advice, and opportunities to just chill-out. These venues also should offer volunteering opportunities as well as access to training and nationally recognised qualifications.
- ❖ **Agreed** that both the Committee and the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee have a key role to play to help improve the youth offer through monitoring and review to ensure that the offer still is relevant and is putting young people at the heart of what LBTH is doing in terms of supporting the community and providers.

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 (i) youth services provision; (ii) progress made to date; (iii) how the challenges have been managed and how will this improve provision; and (iv) the targets that have been set for the provision and how it will be monitored.

8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting Q3 2021/22

The Committee considered a report on the strategic performance and delivery reporting – Q3 2021/22 that is going to Cabinet on 9th March 2022 and supplies an update on the delivery and implementation of the Council's Strategic Plan throughout 2021/22. The main points arising from the questioning on the presentation have been abridged as follows:

The Committee:

- ❖ **Wanted** to know the current position with regard to those who are awaiting these assessments with regard to Education Healthcare Plan (EHCP) assessments completed within the statutory timescales of 20 weeks. In response they **noted** that it is very dependent on the child and their needs as to whether there is a significant delay in completing the assessment.
- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH have already put in the extra support to meet a child's needs and their EHCP assessment will then confirm and make sustainable funding for that added ability. Although in other instances where specialist input is needed, then potentially there is an impact in the short term.
- ❖ **Noted** that when there is a need for specialist input then it should be recognised that the extra weeks that it takes to complete those assessments has seen an improvement in performance although LBTH have struggled with levels of staffing absence which was related to the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant in particular around December 2021. Although about staffing levels in the frontline child protection teams in the Borough LBTH have tried to ensure there are never any gaps.
- ❖ Was **advised** that whilst it is true to say that the London local market is very problematic at the moment which has had an impact on performance LBTH is now in a much better position now.
- ❖ **Noted** with regard to the percentage of completed homes that are classed as affordable depends very much on the performance of the marketplace and clearly that has suffered a series of challenges as a result of Covid and the interplay of a number of competing factors (**e.g.**, private sector schemes).
- ❖ **Noted** with regard to the percentage of customers who are satisfied with the online customer experience that councillors have noticed some improvement in the quality of that over the last three years which is to be welcomed.
- ❖ **Expressed** concerns about the ability of some of the Boroughs constituents who are older; disabled or do not have English as a first language to be able to use the LBTH online systems as they find it confusing and difficult.

- ❖ **Agreed** that if when contacting the LBTH that process goes wrong or if the customer has not been able to access the online system then their experience will not necessarily be captured as part of that exercise. However, when accessing a particular service has worked it should not be taken as a complete measure of success in terms of overall service delivery.
- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH have more resources into the contact centre during the Covid period because it has also served as the hotline for queries around Covid (**e.g.**, the ability to book vaccinations).
- ❖ **Agreed** that LBTH has been working to make the contact centre more customer-centric and is also working to become more strategic in the way it connects with other agencies and functions in the Council. The challenge being that these different agencies and functions sometimes do not always connect, interact, or work as closely as they could.
- ❖ **Agreed** that the aim needs to be to ensure that the contact centre is equipped with the tools, capabilities, and telephony to ensure collaboration and communication between different agencies and functions.
- ❖ **Noted** that with regard to the number of residents supported into work through the WorkPath partnership that there is still uncertainty over the pace, breadth, and scale of changes within the economy effects on our economic prospects for some time. Therefore, **agreed** that there should be an absolute key focus to support residents into employment, especially post pandemic and it should be driven by clear and ambitious targets moving towards more training and skills whilst finding funding streams available from the Government and the European Union.
- ❖ **Noted** that Local authorities tend to work with the harder to reach groups of people and at present the market is very fragile.
- ❖ **Agreed** that those emerging from a drug treatment successfully need to be interpreted with Covid in mind (**e.g.**, what happened during the higher periods of Covid infection was that the support networks around those receiving treatment were considered valuable in terms of people's well-being). **Noted** that it was actually in some sense similar to the wider measures on the rehabilitation of people coming out of hospital and what LBTH had to do was adjust the mechanisms to deal with the pandemic and people's needs within that context. In addition, it was noted that the available figures are not really compatible with other periods.

In conclusion, the Chair placed on record his appreciation to all those Members present for their involvement in the deliberations on Strategic Performance and Delivery Report together with (i) Mayor John Biggs; (ii) Chief Executive Will Tuckley; and (iii) Thorsten Dreyer, Head of Intelligence & Performance.

8.2 Budget monitoring report 2021-22 - P9

The Committee considered the P9 budget monitoring that report is going to Cabinet on 9th March 2022 which included details about the **(i)** General Fund

Revenue, **(ii)** Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), **(iii)** Housing Revenue Account (HRA); and **(iv)** progress made against savings targets. The main points arising from the questioning on the presentation are outlined below:

- ❖ **Agreed** that whilst new data shows that cases of Covid have fallen since the peak of the Omicron wave in January, the recent slight increase in infections in those over 55 has shown that the pandemic is not yet over and that there will be further Covid related expenditure in the year.
- ❖ **Noted** that LBTH will have to assess the ongoing pressures into the new year of Covid and that it is expected that there to be more calls on the available funding that LBTH has received instead of any funding being leftover to use next year.
- ❖ **Noted** the projection for the General Fund outturn is for an overspend of £0.1m, which already considers the use of some earmarked reserves in delivering services (**i.e.**, without the use of these reserves there would be a higher forecast overspend). Moreover, given the latest forecast financial position, earmarked and General Fund reserves are consequently projected to reduce; from £212.2m to £189.4m by the end of this financial year.
- ❖ **Noted** that the reserves position of the Council is uncertain pending the closure of the statement of accounts for the period 2016 – 2021.
- ❖ **Noted** that the continuing reduction in reserves is clearly not a sustainable position for the Council given the constraints imposed by the current Medium Term Financial Strategy and the associated need to have net expenditure in line with approved budgets.
- ❖ **Noted** that a briefing note would be provided on technology enabled care to support people to live safely and independently in their own homes.
- ❖ Was **informed** that the continuing reduction in reserves is clearly not a sustainable position for the Council given the constraints imposed by the current Medium Term Financial Strategy and the associated need to have net expenditure in line with approved budgets.
- ❖ **Noted** in regard to the HRA capital spend a significant level of spend is forecast for the last quarter of the year.

Following discussions on the report Chair thanked all those Committee Members in attendance together with **(i)** Councillor Candida Ronald (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector) and **(ii)** Nisar Visram (Director of Finance, Procurement & Audit), for their contributions to the discussions on the General Fund Revenue, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and progress made against savings targets.

9. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

The Chair placed on record his thanks to the scrutiny leads in terms of the work that they have undertaken in the past 12 months which had been a challenging and demanding year for the Council's scrutiny function within Tower Hamlets.

In addition, it was **Noted** that on the:

- ❖ 15th of March 2022 Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee would be looking at: **(i)** quarterly performance data in relation to delivering effective and customer focused services by the Social Landlords with homes in the Borough; **(ii)** Housing Strategy 2016-21: Delivery Themes; and **(iii)** the Final updates on Open Spaces and Homelessness Reduction Act Action Plans.
- ❖ 8th of March 2022 Health & Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee would be looking at: **(i)** Update on Adults Learning Disability Scrutiny Action Plan; **(ii)** Post-Covid syndrome, also known as Long Covid.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

This report supplies a summary of the work that Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), its sub-committees and scrutiny leads delivered in 2021-22 municipal year. A summary of the discussion on the report is set out below:

The Committee:

- ❖ **Agreed** on that there had been a really positive improvement in Scrutiny since the establishment of the various sub-committees as it had allowed for more in-depth examination of decisions, policies, and the performance of council services and had given the public increased opportunities to be involved in decisions that will affect their lives.
- ❖ **Agreed** that the scrutiny function needs to be supported to get a greater understanding of how spending matches against policies, the exposure to significant risk, and to be presented with regular information so that scrutiny members can ask questions and challenge the deliverability of services.
- ❖ **Agreed** that the Council collectively and the senior leadership of the authority should think about putting more resources in the development of the scrutiny subcommittees to help the Cabinet to make the right decisions or to reflect on decisions that have been made.
- ❖ **Agreed** on the need for rigorous efforts to feed in opinions of residents, for scrutiny to be able to make meaningful contributions to the work of the Council and lives of local communities.
- ❖ **Agreed** that as a committee a lot has been achieved in terms of looking at current issues (**e.g.**, budget pressures and anti-social behaviour) and putting the executive under the spotlight and to seeking the views of residents.
- ❖ **Agreed** on the importance of an open and transparent culture that welcomes constructive challenge can be difficult to maintain at the best of times. However, the role of scrutiny is especially important in the context of the current uncertainties, to give that vital overview of complex systems and partnership working and to reflect community concerns.

In conclusion, the Chair express is appreciation all scrutiny members their contributions over the past 12 months and the Committee resolved to:

1. **Note** the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22.
2. **Agreed** that the report be submitted to Full Council in the new municipal year; and
3. **Authorised** the Director Strategy, Improvement and Transformation to amend the report following comments by the committee before submission to Full Council.

11. 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**).

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

Councillor Pappu formally placed on record his thanks to the Committee Members and the following officers for their invaluable support of the scrutiny process over the past year.

- Sharon Godman – (Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)
- Afazul Hoque – (Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
- Daniel Kerr – (Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
- David Knight – (Democratic Services Officer, Committees)
- Filuck Miah – (Strategy and Policy Officer)

In addition, the Chair on behalf of the Committee placed on record its sincere thanks to Councillor Denise Jones for her invaluable service to the residents of Tower Hamlets as an elected member over the past 30 years and for the diligent discharge of her duties over that time.

Councillor Jones responded to the vote of thanks officers who she said were unfailingly helpful and an unseen strength within the Council.

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. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

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

Nil items

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

Nil items

The meeting ended at 8.15 p.m.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Questions	Response
Item 6.4 Service Action Plan: How parking permit policy can influence people's behaviour	
<p>1. Recommendation 5 from the Challenge Session references <i>“Parking services being extended to the provision for permits to those residents who are moving to car free developments but require daily usage of their vehicle for their employment such as taxis and mobile care workers”</i>.</p> <p>However, there is no mention of this really specific recommendation in the Action Plan?</p>	<p>The service did not include an Action Plan response to recommendation five (listed in the PDSQ) because the chair of the challenge session had reviewed the draft report recommendations prior to its publication for OSC and agreed to withdraw the recommendation as it would breach equality considerations.</p>
Item 6.7 Therapy Provision for Children Under 5 with Special Education Needs and Disability Proposal	
<p>2. The money for this service is coming from the High Needs Block within the DSG. What else is being cut to free up this funding?</p>	<p>We have received an above inflation increase of 8% in the High Needs Block for both 2021/22 and 2022/23. Therefore there will be no cut in other services to fund this commitment as the uplift will cover the costs and enable us to expand Speech and Language provision for children under 5 that need it.</p>

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