



TOWER HAMLETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22



Table of Contents

CHAIR'S FOREWORD.....	3
MEMBERSHIP	5
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE.....	7
HEALTH & ADULTS SUB-COMMITTEE.....	10
CHILDREN & EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE	13
HOUSING & REGENERATION SUB-COMMITTEE.....	16
ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY	19
FINANCE & RESOURCES	20

CHAIR'S FOREWORD

I'm delighted to introduce this report which provides a summary of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's (OSC) activity in 2021-22.

This year, I aimed to ensure a collaborative approach to scrutiny across all our committees which captured residents' concerns and had a tangible impact on service delivery. I wanted our committees to make proactive recommendations and shine a light on the impact that policy decisions, service reductions and budget cuts are having on our residents. To support this, I released several videos to promote upcoming meetings and invited residents to submit their questions which the committee would then raise during our discussions. I'd like to thank all residents for their valuable contributions throughout the year and encourage you to continue to engage with the committee in the year ahead.

As the borough progressed in its recovery from COVID-19 and faced new challenges presented from the Omicron variant, I asked each committee to include at least one COVID-19 recovery item in its work programme. OSC also received monthly written updates from the Director of Public Health, and we held a spotlight session with the Cabinet Lead for Adults Health and Wellbeing and Corporate Director for Health Adults and Community to discuss challenges and the council's priorities moving forward as we plan to 'live with Covid'.

I also wanted to ensure greater executive accountability through our work programme. Therefore, OSC held a number of Cabinet Member spotlights and/or spotlights on a particular area within Members portfolio, with each Cabinet Member invited on at least once occasion. This helped to facilitate a broad range of discussions on key policy areas such as housing, youth services, liveable streets, digital exclusion, waste services, community safety, and workforce diversity.

Budget scrutiny remained a priority for OSC as we aimed alleviate some of the hardship many of our residents are facing as we progress in our recovery from the pandemic and are challenged by a cost-of-living crisis. The committee made several recommendations to Cabinet to ensure it sets a budget which truly protects services, supports our most vulnerable, helps residents with the increased cost of living and invests to unlock opportunity for all.

This report marks the end of another four years scrutinising the administration of Tower Hamlets Council. During that time, the work of OSC and its three Sub-Committees (Health & Adults, Housing & Regeneration, and Children & Education) has been extensive as we have investigated and reviewed some of the biggest issues facing the Council and residents. From the challenge of the Council's budget to the impact of Brexit, COVID-19, Liveable Streets, Waste Services, Youth Services, community safety and children's improvement programme. Looking beyond the upcoming election, I'd ask the next administration, and the council's corporate leadership, to recognise the value of the scrutiny function, and ensure it is prioritised to be a key part of the council's governance, policy development and decision making.

I would like to thank the committee Members, officers and partners who have contributed and supported scrutiny during the year. I hope this report helps you to understand the work and value of scrutiny and that it enthruses you to get involved.

Cllr Mohammed Pappu,

Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

MEMBERSHIP

Membership - Scrutiny Committees

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the principal Member-led body that holds the executive to account and provides a critical friend challenge to a wide range of issues of strategic importance. To support this the scrutiny arrangements in Tower Hamlets includes a main Overview and Scrutiny Committee, three sub-committees and two scrutiny leads covering portfolio areas. These include:

Committee	Role
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) You can view the agenda, reports and minutes of this committee by clicking on the link: Tower Hamlets Council - Browse meetings - Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
Councillor Mohammed Pappu	Chair
Councillor Bex White	Vice Chair and Scrutiny Chair for Children and Education Sub-Committee
Councillor Gabriela Salva- Macallan	Scrutiny Chair for Health and Adults Sub-Committee
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	Scrutiny Chair for Housing and Regeneration Sub-Committee
Councillor Leema Qureshi	Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	Scrutiny Lead Environment and Community Safety
Councillor Marc Francis	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Denise Jones	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Scrutiny Member
Halima Islam	Co-opted Member
James Wilson	Co-opted Member
Health & Adults Sub-Committee (HASSC) HASSC's terms of reference can be found here: Health & Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference	
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	Chair
Councillor Faroque Ahmed	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Kabir Ahmed	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Shah Ameen	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Denise Jones	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Puru Miah	Scrutiny Member

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

David Burbidge	Co-opted Member
Sue Kenten	Co-opted Member
Children & Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee (CESSC) You can view the agenda, reports and minutes of this committee by clicking on the link: Tower Hamlets Council - Committee details - Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee	
Councillor Bex White	Chair
Councillor Shad Chowdhury	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Helal Uddin	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Abdal Ullah	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Scrutiny Member
Abena Adeji	Co-opted Member
Joanna Hannan	Co-opted Member
Dr Phillip Rice	Vice Chair & Co-opted Member
Ashraf Zaman	Co-opted Member
Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee (HRSSC) You can view the agenda, reports and minutes of this committee by clicking on the link: Tower Hamlets Council - Committee details - Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee	
Councillor Ehtasham Haque	Chair
Councillor Marc Francis	Vice Chair
Councillor Amina Ali	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Victoria Obaze	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Helal Uddin	Scrutiny Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Scrutiny Member
Anne Ambrose	Co-opted Member
Moshin Hamim	Co-opted Member

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Scrutiny Work Programme

The 2021-22 [Scrutiny Work Programme](#) focused on the council's strategic priorities, residents' concerns and key policy issues. Meetings of the Committee are public and you can view recordings of all meetings online: [click to access video recordings](#).

Swimming Provision

In September 2021, the Committee held a [review to consider current and future swimming provision in the borough](#) and found that current provision requires significant investment and refurbishment. The current reduction in provision is having a significant impact on access for residents, schools and other sports groups. It was noted capacity will increase in early 2022 following completion of refurbishment work on two centres.

The Committee made seven recommendations which focussed on improving access and developing and maintaining leisure centres which meet the needs of the borough's growing population. A long-term capital investment strategy must be developed to ensure they are maintained to a high standard. As part of the session, the Committee asked to be engaged in the consultation on leisure facilities which considered future need. Cabinet agreed a response to the scrutiny recommendations and the associated action plan can be found [here](#).

Digital Inclusion Strategy

In September 2021, the Committee reviewed the council's proposal for the new [Digital Inclusion Strategy](#) and helped to shape the strategy and action plan. The Committee considered the approach to developing the strategy, insights on the key barriers that residents face, use of resources and levels of engagement with stakeholders.

The Committee was pleased to hear that such a comprehensive body of work has been undertaken to form this plan, with several partners engaged to help drive implementation across the borough and research commissioned to help understand the nuances of our local need.

The Committee noted that whilst there are several encouraging actions in place to support residents to be digitally included and increase residents' access, we must not lose sight of the fact that there a number of people who do not want, or are not able to, use digital services. The Committee recommended that the council make it easier to use the council's website to access services and look to develop a user friendly, plain English digital platform as advocated in the Poverty Review.

Liveable Streets Programme

In October 2021, the Committee reviewed the progress of the [Liveable Streets Programme](#). It was a very productive discussion, and the Committee welcomed further engagement on the programme as it enters a period of review to consider how to amend the programme to best meet the needs of all our residents.

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

The Committee welcomed the level of resident engagement on this topic and received an open letter from residents (217 signatures) highlighting their concerns regarding the Liveable Streets Programme.

The Committee recommended the council to really listen and respond to what our residents are telling us and this needs to be an iterative process given the nature of this programme and the wider perception of what other boroughs are doing. The council must ensure that as it moves through each stage of the programme, it is taking our residents with us and guiding them through what are transformative changes to their habits and behaviours.

The Committee recognises that getting the balance right is always going to be challenging but keeping our residents and other stakeholders informed in a timely manner will be critical to the delivering the programme successfully.

It's clear to the Committee that the council must move swiftly to find a resolution to address the concerns our residents have raised, and this programme has become very polarising and damaging for our community. [To this end, the Committee submitted several recommendations to help tackle and progress some of the key issues emerging from the programme.](#)

Waste Services

In November 2021, OSC held a spotlight on [Waste Services](#). The Committee reviewed waste and recycling performance since the service came back in-house and considered the service response to complaints around fly tipping, contamination and missed collections. The Committee also questioned the on-going issue around adapted vehicles for collection that have broken down frequently and contamination of waste and illegal dumping of waste.

The Committee made several recommendations to improve the performance of the service, including improving communication on issues of contamination to help increase residents' confidence and behaviour. The Committee also recommended that the council invests in more collection vehicles to increase service resilience and capacity, improve and expand enforcement procedures, improve communications around recycling champions, and raise awareness that small electrical items can be disposed at Ideas Stores

Housing

In December 2021, the Committee scrutinised the delivering of the borough's housing priorities. The discussion focused on the number of housing projects delivered and planned work including key housing challenges and the update on Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Committee was pleased to hear about the progress made with house building and welcomed the volume of buyback on right to buy properties to house homeless households and mitigate the financial pressures arising from the increased costs.

The Committee raised concerns on the deterioration in the quality of service being offered by some registered housing providers such as disrepairs and anti-social

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

behaviour. The Committee also heard on some of the continuing challenges of rising rent, poverty, and the impact of Brexit on cost of labour, skills and materials.

The Committee scrutinised the lack of accountability of signatories to the Tower Hamlets Housing Covenant that sets out a commitment by the borough on providing:

- quality and value for money housing services;
- shared commitment to Tower Hamlets residents; and
- maximise the supply of affordable housing and housing options.

The committee wrote to the Mayor and Cabinet Member requesting assurance on holding all the signatories to account and outlined actions to be taken for failure.

Mayor's Spotlight

In February 2022, the Committee held a spotlight with Mayor John Biggs and focussed on his achievements, some of the key challenges and priorities for the future. The Committee heard how priorities had been affected by COVID-19, budget challenges and the demand for statutory services. The Committee also noted challenges such as meeting housing targets, issues with street cleansing, and behaviour change.

The Committee sought clarity on the council's approach to address the demand for large four-to-five-bedroom properties, continuing issues with the refuse and recycling performance, and council's strategy on return to office post COVID-19.

Strategic Delivery Performance Reporting and Budget Monitoring

Each year OSC reviews the council's strategic performance and management of the council's budget on a quarterly basis. OSC scrutinises the Strategic Delivery Performance Reporting which is set against the council's [Strategic Plan](#) – outlining key priorities and outcomes to be achieve. Each municipal year in January, the council sets its [budget](#) through its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and as a 'critical friend' to the council, OSC undertakes a quarterly check and challenge approach to monitor the budget, holding the executive to account to ensure that forecasted spends and savings set out in the budget are being delivered whilst scrutinising the rationale for any budget challenges.

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of those who took time to contribute to the work of scrutiny this year and all those who provide health and wellbeing support to the residents of Tower Hamlets.

The committee has aimed to have a proactive approach to driving service improvement, rather than being reactive in response to decisions of the council executive, NHS and health partners. The committee has been mindful of the impact of the pandemic upon residents, services and staff. During the peak of the pandemic, the committee was keen to ensure the health service, adult social care and other stakeholders including community and voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets were able to respond to the needs of the community particularly those who are vulnerable.

The role of the sub-committee this year has been to focus on the impact of covid 19 and apply the learning to support the ongoing work to restore health and care provision in Tower Hamlets. The committee started the year with a review of COVID-19 and looked at specific areas related to COVID-19 recovery as part of the workplan, such as COVID-19 Mental Health Services and Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF).

The NHS landscape is rapidly transforming with changes to the NHS and transformation to an Integrated Care System and new function of Tower Hamlets Together. The committee has spent some time over the past 18 months looking at this development and its anticipated implications to the health and care infrastructure and governance locally. As I look ahead towards future challenges and role of this committee, such a change will inevitably have a substantial impact on our role. I hope that scrutiny finds a place within the new structure so that it can fully perform its functions.

Cllr Gabriella Salva Macallan, Chair of Health and adults Scrutiny sub-committee

HEALTH & ADULTS

Protecting older people in care homes

Health and Adults scrutiny sub-committee has considered a report on older people's care homes specifically looking at the support residents of care homes and its staff received during the pandemic.

The committee investigated the multi-disciplinary team and public health input that went in to care homes during the pandemic to support 215 residents in these settings. The committee was particularly interested to ensure the right levels of prevention and management of outbreaks are in place to properly protect the residents of care homes and its staff.

The committee heard from staff/management of a care home to better understand the care homes perspective e.g. of what was working well, what are the challenges, what is the focus over the coming months etc. The committee noted the substantial loss of lives during the pandemic, and felt it was important to hear from families of

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

residents of care homes to better understand the lived experiences of residents of care homes and their families.

The committee recommended that commissioners and partners continue to engage with care homes, residents' families and other stakeholders to identify long term recommendations for

Vaccination programme

GP Care Group was also invited to meetings to advise on their vaccination programme and how it was working with partners to roll out vaccines in care homes and more widely across the borough. The committee was interested to understand the low uptake of vaccines amongst certain groups of the community including care home staff and how the issue of general hesitancy was being addressed collaboratively with stakeholders including the community and across the wider North-East London landscape.

Support for asylum seekers

In December 2020, as part of Operation Oak, 443 asylum seekers were placed in 3 hostels in Tower Hamlets without prior notification affecting the Council's ability to work with relevant departments and partners to support this groups of people and their families. Tower Hamlets has assigned a coordinator to work across departments to ensure statutory obligations are being met.

The committee was particularly interested to understand how asylum seekers were supported into accommodation and integrated into society as well as assessing whether appropriate safeguarding measures are put in place during the pandemic.

The sub-committee recommended that support for young people not in school is explored further such as how service users with no recourse to public funds may be able to access support under Care Act & Human Rights Act, support with additional food supplies, household cleaning and hygiene items both at food banks and with deliveries as well as creating more opportunities for these young people.

Restoring elective care and outpatient services in Royal London Hospital

Since April 2021, we have been informed that Barts Health is speedily restoring patient services that were put on hold during the pandemic. This includes working closely with system partners across north-east London and the independent sector to restore levels of service and reduce waiting times in elective surgery, outpatients and other services.

Barts Health will continue to prioritise patients by the urgency of treatment they require, and the average wait for those needing urgent surgery has reduced significantly. They are monitoring activity to ensure that services are restored equitably, whilst balancing the need for staff rest and recovery.

During the pandemic, patient and families experience of services have highlighted poor communication from health professionals and lack of cultural awareness affecting the treatment of patients during that time. The committee is keen to see

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

health partners work with Healthwatch and patient groups to inform service provision going forward.

Impact of covid 19 pandemic on Mental Health

People's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in some experiencing mental illness. The pandemic has impacted on the full spectrum of mental health and wellbeing including increased stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, grief and PTSD.

Wider determinants of mental health have been negatively impacted by the pandemic – employment, social contact, education. This has likely been further exacerbated in Tower Hamlets due to overcrowding levels and lack of outside space.

The pandemic's impact on population mental health presents a challenge for widening existing inequalities in our society and the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups and demographics will need to be a key area of focus going forward e.g. Grief & PTSD may be more prevalent in groups most directly impacted by the pandemic: older people, those in care homes, people with a disability, BAME communities and frontline health & care staff.

Food poverty

Tower Hamlets Food Partnership (THFP) was established in 2018 by the Council. It was a recommendation from the Food Poverty JSNA 'to bring stakeholders together regularly to co-create solutions, develop action groups on priority areas and identify a way for the partnership to be sustainable'.

The sub-committee has been working closely with the Public Health, Council officers and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion to embed a number of recommendations that will support culture change including how people interact with food and nutrition as well as how we better utilise assets such as community kitchens to support communities prepare hot meals especially during a crisis.

Inner North East London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (INEL JHOSC)

Councillor Shah Ameen, Councillor Faroque Ahmed and Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan have represented the Sub-Committee on the INEL JHOSC which scrutinises NHS matters affecting the Inner North East London area. The work of the INEL JHOSC was also impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with responses to the pandemic scrutinised along with progress with vaccination roll-out across the footprint.

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

Children and young people will feel the effects of the pandemic for many years to come. Whether due to the extended periods when they were not able to physically attend school, because their financial situations deteriorated or the isolation and lack of social contact that they endured. It has been my intention therefore throughout the pandemic to highlight the impact that Covid 19 has had on children, young people and their families and shine a spotlight on the incredible work that those who support them have undertaken as well as the challenges that they have faced.

In the past year, we have placed the voices of children and young people at the centre of our work programme, endeavouring to hear from them at each meeting. We have also been able to hear from council staff and partners who have worked throughout this most difficult of times to ensure that the impacts of Covid 19 have been mitigated. I would like to thank the elected and co-opted members for the diligence and rigour in which they have undertaken their duties

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all of those who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support children and families.

Cllr Bex White, Chair of Children and Education Sub Committee

CHILDRENS & EDUCATION

Each meeting of the sub-committee had a focus on a different area of the pandemic response. The committee was fortunate to be addressed by council staff, partners and particularly young people themselves to outline their experiences and how we can all work together to improve outcomes.

June 2021

- The theme of the Covid 19 update was in respect to how our Parks staff have managed throughout the pandemic. The committee heard how due to the demographics and housing situation in the borough, parks provide vital outside space to many who do not have access in their own homes. During the height of lockdown and particularly when the decision was taken to close Victoria Park, staff faced a lot of public anger as well as having to enforce an ever-changing raft of guidelines.
- The committee also heard from the newly appointed Director of Education about his early impressions and his priorities for the coming year.
- The final item was a spotlight on the Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation strategy and how this was being used to address serious issues of criminal and sexual exploitation. The committee heard from the Head of the Exploitation and the Metropolitan Police about their approach to tackling these very serious issues

September 21

- The theme of the Covid-19 update was mental health and emotional wellbeing. The committee heard three powerful presentations from young

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

people linked to Spotlight Youth Service about how the pandemic had impacted on children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. These young people articulated the quite significant impacts and where they had been able to seek support. It was clear that while there is provision out there, it is not always well known and that there is more to be done to ensure that this support is accessible. Dr Helen Jones, who leads on the Health Spot Service and is the GP Lead for Mental Health, also spoke to the committee on how the points raised by the young people resonated strongly with her professional experience.

- The committee also heard a brief update on the recent SEND Inspection which took place in July 2021. As the final outcome had not been confirmed at that point, it was not possible to discuss in detail, however a deep dive session was scheduled for later in the year.
- The final outcome was a presentation by the TH Safeguarding Children's Partnership including their annual report. The committee heard from James Thomas, Director of Children and Culture as the representative of the three statutory partners (local authority, clinical commissioning group and Metropolitan Police). He explained the work of the partnership, and how it differed from the previous LSCB.
- The committee also heard from the Independent Scrutineer. He explained his role and said he is the 'critical friend' to the partnership. He said the Partnership's handling of the covid-19 pandemic had led to fortnightly meetings to pick up on immediate issues and he was impressed with the responsiveness of the partnership.

October 21

- The Sub-Committee received a verbal update on the continued impact Covid-19 was having on secondary school education, in particular on older young people who had missed exams due to the lockdown. The committee heard from a secondary headteacher and a Year 12 student about how they had addressed the concerns related to the cancellation of exams and how they were preparing for these to be reinstated.
- The committee receive a presentation on the financial position of the council services for children and where there were particular budget pressures. These included the High Needs Funding Block for children with SEND as well as pressures of school budgets. The committee heard how these were being addressed and where expected future pressures were likely to arise.
- The final item was a presentation on "School Streets". The committee were grateful to hear from the lead member Cllr Kahar Chowdhury and the team responsible for the programme to better understand how the scheme has been implemented. The primary aims were to reduce congestion at drop off and pick up times and introduce safer walking and cycling as well as reduce pollution. As with any programmes of this nature, there are often opposing views, but the team explained their consultation and engagement processes and how they sought to address affected residents concerns.

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

- The committee also received a brief update following the publication of the SEND Inspection outcome and the requirement for the local authority to produce a Written Statement of Action.

December 21

- The committee had an update on Children's Social Care including a focus on the impact of the pandemic. It was great to hear from a number of front-line practitioners about how they have been supporting children and families throughout the pandemic and how it continues to impact on their work.
- The committee heard from the Acting Director for Supporting Families about the directorate as a whole and how staff were managing the current situation.
- The Corporate Director for Children and Culture, James Thomas commented on the shocking and distressing murder of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, in Solihull, which had received much coverage and reaction. Mr Thomas said a reasonable question to ask would be if something as shocking could happen here in Tower Hamlets. He said there could never be a guarantee that children will not be abused however, the extreme levels of abuse in Arthur's case are rare. Mr Thomas cited Professor Eileen Munro's report saying all leaders must work to reduce harm and risk, but child abuse could not be eliminated. He said for this reason harm to children remained a top corporate risk and various mitigations were in place to combat this, including the Local Safeguarding Partnership, whose role is to externally quality assure the systems in place.
- Finally, the committee consider a presentation in respect to support for children we care and those who are leaving our care. As part of this the committee heard from two care leavers about the work of Children Living in Care Council and how they have been supported in their transition to adulthood.

Throughout this extraordinary time, the focus of the services within the Housing and Regeneration portfolio has been to support our residents given the exceptional circumstances and economic and social uncertainties that they have faced. Consequently, as chair of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee, my attention has been invested in ensuring that residents have whatever additional support they have needed during this time while ensuring that the council and its partners maintain the provision our existing services throughout the pandemic.

In this respect, the decision to examine the performance of social housing landlords at every one of our meetings has been vindicated. We invited a different partner housing provider to appear at every meeting and we raised issues of performance and delivery with them, based on what their residents told us as councillors. More widely, over the last year, we have continued our focus on two specific areas: the quality of the housing options service and the important issue of fire and building safety.

The Housing Options Service has worked hard to ensure that those who needed support as a result of the pandemic have had the help and assistance that they have needed. Key achievements included the successful delivery of the *Everyone In* initiative and ongoing delivery of improvements to the customer journey.

Along with THHF partners, the council is working with the London Fire Brigade (LFB) on how best to engage with residents on fire safety issues and are in discussion with the LFB on producing a fire safety video and creating a Tower Hamlets Fire Safety Forum – which may include managing agents and leaseholder representatives as part of the engagement process.

Cllr Ehtasham Haque, Chair of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee

HOUSING & REGENERATION

June 2021

We agreed the work programme for the year and considered a presentation on the Planning Bill white Paper along with the implications, key issues and the preparedness of the council of the forthcoming changes.

At this meeting we also held a “listening session” with residents with the aim of undertaking a more in-depth analysis of fire safety issues over the summer, following a fire in a flat in a tower block at New Providence Wharf.

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

September 2021

We recommenced our regular slot of examining the performance of social landlords operating in the borough at this meeting. We heard directly from a group of residents from one local housing provider about the lack of services they were receiving and agreed to ask the organisation to attend our meeting in October to respond to their residents' allegations.

We also reviewed the findings of audit report into housing allocations and the council's response and considered the work in developing an intermediate housing register of interest.

Our focus was on the findings of the "deep-dive" into fire safety practices across the borough and what lessons can be learned including what the council can do to improve or mitigate fire safety risks. The outcome of this was that we agreed to recommend to the Mayor in Cabinet a wide-ranging set of proposals to improve fire and building safety across the borough.

October 2021

The chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum provided an update on work of the THHF benchmarking group in response to the sub committee's previous comments and observations on the way performance data is presented.

We heard from the Director of Growth and Integration on improving employment outcomes for residents with a focus on partnership working opportunities. We discussed apprenticeship opportunities and raised awareness of smaller projects and providers across the borough that have helped residents obtain work.

We considered the benefits and outcomes of the council's regeneration work focussing on the impact of council's recent approach to regeneration. We recommended that this important work should be considered again and involve wider representation from across the council, its partners and other local authorities.

December 2021

We heard from Peabody HA on their performance in delivering housing services to residents across the borough and had a personal representation from the chair of a resident's association about their experience of a recent decanting exercise. The outcome of this was that we agreed to write to the association and express our concern

We closed the loop on an earlier examination (last year) of our allocations policy by reviewing the implementation and impact of the recent change in allocations policy regarding use of the private rented sector.

We received a presentation on the consultation exercise with council tenants to modernise out tenancy agreement which has not been changed since its introduction in 1999. We expressed concern over the low response rate to the consultation exercise.

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

The pandemic highlighted significant inequalities in the borough compounded by community tensions and antisocial behaviour. Women and girls' safety is at the forefront of the committee's attention and the committee has ensured a robust challenge and engagement with the authorities that are there to protect them has taken place.

As we move to recovery, I have focussed my scrutiny attention on how the council can contribute to improving the environment. Both parking pressures and a growing population brings its own challenges. This year, I have focussed on scrutinising the factors that impact parking pressures and road traffic management in the borough and how the council's parking permit policy can better serve the use public space. I welcome this report in highlighting some of the key work undertaken on the environment and community safety portfolio.

Cllr Faroque Ahmed, Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety

Community Safety Spotlight

In February 2022, OSC focussed on [community safety](#) and invited the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and the Borough Commander to review and consider the achievements, challenges and the local policing priorities for 2022-23.

The Borough Commander outlined his priorities for the Borough Commander Unit (BCU) this year and included street and youth-based violence, violence and against women and girls (VAWG), drugs and antisocial behaviour, burglary, public protection, building trust and confidence and better engagement and strengthening partnerships.

The Borough Commander also outlined some of their achievements from the crime and detection figures including issues such as anti-social behaviour, use of stop and search powers and highlighted their success on addressing local drug dealing through the 'Operation Continuum' strategy.

OSC raised a number of key resident concerns with the borough commander and this included the wider reported police behaviour and culture, safety of women and

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

girls with the night time economy and use of public transport, safety measures to improve town centre public spaces after dark, the treatment of sexual offences when they are reported and number of convictions, charges against those with dangerous weapons and types of cross borough partnership work used to tackle serious youth violence and county lines.

The committee also sought clarity on the reduction of prolonged abstraction of dedicated ward officers (DWO) to other policing activities and emphasised the impact this has on local neighbourhoods.

Environment Challenge Session: The extent to which council's parking permit policy influences people's behaviour

In November 2021, OSC held a scrutiny challenge session to consider [the extent to which the council's parking permit policy influences people's behaviour](#). The committee wanted to better understand:

- how the council's current parking permit scheme influences people's behaviour on parking;
- likely impact on the scheme and parking in general because of more planned car free dwellings, expansion of London's ULEZ boundaries, residents' motivation to switch to electric vehicles; and
- learning from neighbouring authorities and experts as part of developing longer-term sustainable parking solutions.

The committee supports the council's ambition to reduce petrol and diesel vehicles to protect the environment and also understands that there is an immediate need to manage the current demand for parking and align this with future demand. The committee made the following recommendations to assist with this:

R1	<p>That the Parking and Mobility Service reviews the parking and permit policies to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) It embeds a documented approach such as a Parking Enforcement Plan for policies such as pricing, control parking zones, permit schemes to manage the highway and parking demand; and(b) It should also detail how these relate to the other council priorities such as climate change, air quality and liveable street and school streets.
R2	<p>That the Parking and Mobility Service consider the following options to better utilise available parking space and incorporate health impact assessments alongside equality considerations to understand the impact they will have on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Reviewing business permit spaces where feasible and how multi-use bays can be better utilised to support the post pandemic economic recovery;(b) Selective use of removal of individual space markings within bays (where there is a high footfall and demand for parking) to support capacity within a limited footprint; and(c) Selective application for increasing the use of kerb parking where footways are unusually wide, increasing carriageway width and in some cases allowing the removal of yellow lines (where there is a high footfall and demand for parking) to support capacity within a limited footprint.
R3	<p>That the Parking and Mobility Service considers ensuring EV charging points</p>

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

	have a maximum stay policy in place to facilitate capacity for others to charge.
R4	That the Parking and Mobility Service reviews the current Permit Transfer Scheme and should include assessing flexibility for residents who may need a short break from vehicle ownership without it impacting their right of accessing the permit when they choose to purchase the vehicle.
R5	That the Parking and Mobility Services uses a targeted approach via CEO monitoring activities to address hotspot areas and co-ordinate with ASB and Enforcement officers to use sanctions where necessary such as ASB orders and temporary use CCTVs to act as deterrence, meet compliance and incentivise behaviour change.
R6	That the Parking and Mobility Services considers the option of setting its emission-based pricing policy over a longer period (for example three years) to help influence buyer behaviour and make the change towards lower emission vehicles.
R7	Car clubs (EV's) as a single borough wide solution for the council, thus reducing further need for costly public service permits and encourage other large employer partners within the borough to sign up with the scheme such as home care providers.

FINANCE & RESOURCES

As we work towards a recovery from the pandemic, it is important to keep focus now more than ever on how the council is managing its finances and resources. This is particularly important at a time when residents are experience a cost-of-living burden, rising energy prices and inflationary pressures and the challenges that this brings on inequality and poverty.

With the challenges on budget uncertainty and increase demand for statutory services, I have focussed on scrutinising the grants being approved to ensure that it offers good value for money and delivers on broader community and social benefits. At OSC, I have continued to review and scrutinise the use of resources and budgetary decisions to ensure the council is focussing and meeting resident's needs. I welcome this report which highlights some of the key work undertaken on finance and resources portfolio.

Cllr Leema Qureshi, Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources

Grant Determination Sub-Committee

At Grant Determination Sub-Committee (GDSC), I lead on scrutinising the grants being approved by the GDSC to obtain assurances that its good value for money and delivers on wider community benefits. This included reviewing a variety of requests for grant funding such as awarding 50% grants up to £10,000 to SMEs who carry and out heat decarbonisation and renewable energy projects, application of the Community Infrastructure Levy to support London Square (New Town Hall), supporting organisations to deliver on the food pantry provision and scrutinising the

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

use of Whitechapel Levelling Up Fund to enable Transport for London to make repairs to properties close to the rail lines.

Council's Budget for 2022-23

In January 2022, OSC undertook a detailed review of the council's proposed budget for 2022-23. OSC felt that the budget assumptions were substantially underestimated resulting in a significant difference of money available and a £5.4 million surplus. OSC acknowledged that the council had exceptional consecutive challenges resulting from austerity, Brexit and COVID-19 pandemic, however OSC felt that a more robust 'in the round' budget proposal could have benefited council services that have or are being proposed to be cut.

OSC recognised that there were a number of areas for the budget that required improvement and recommended the following:

Medium Term Financial Strategy	
R1	Provide the committee with modelling of what impact changes to income in future years will have on the council's finances, providing insight of worst-case, medium case, and best-case scenario
R2	<p>a. Establish a funding approach that includes a refreshed Reserves' Policy – so that it does not operate in isolation and is integrated; attach confidence levels/levels of assurance against items and aspects projected to happen and reflect on past projections to learn from those things we have previously predicted/assumed that have not eventuated; and</p> <p>b. Review modelling for income projections and expenditure assumptions to ensure income growth is more accurately reflected</p>
R3	In light of the additional £5.4m, review previously agreed savings alongside the equalities impact assessment and identify where additional funding can be allocated. In particular savings which have or will have the greatest impact on access to frontline services and vulnerable people must be reviewed
R4	<p>That the council restructures its budget setting process so that it has a greater focus on delivering priorities and measuring impact.</p> <p>a. Conduct the Budget Consultation (which gauges public priorities) at the beginning of the municipal year; and</p> <p>b. That the council restructures its budget setting process so that it has a greater focus on delivering priorities and measuring outcomes</p>
Fees and Charges	
R5	Reduce the level of increase to market trader fees and charges which will have a significant impact on people's livelihood and ability to stay in employment i.e. charges impacting market traders at Watney market, Columbia Road, Whitechapel market, and Bethnal Green Road
R6	Review the fees and charges for hiring of venues such as community hubs, ideas store, Brady Centre to make them more affordable and accessible for local community organisations and groups
R7	Provide a link on the fees and charges for community based social care services and residential care services within the fees and charges report

OSC Annual Report 2021-22

Additional Budget Meeting	
R8	Provide OSC with a briefing note setting out the position of the Waste Services Reorganisation and the Technology Enabled Care Saving
R9	Include a list of the previously agreed savings for 2022-23 in the budget papers presented to Full Council