

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2022**

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

**Members Present:**

Councillor Musthak Ahmed (Chair)  
Councillor Abdul Mannan (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury (Member)  
Councillor Marc Francis (Member)  
Councillor Asma Islam (Member)  
Councillor Ahmodur Khan (Member)  
Jahid Ahmed (Co-Optee) (Co-optee)  
Halima Islam (Co-Optee) Scrutiny Co-Optee

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Kabir Ahmed Cabinet Member for Regeneration,  
Inclusive Development and  
Housebuilding

**Officers Present:**

Raj Chand – (Director of Customer Services)  
Daniel Kerr – (Strategy and Policy Manager)  
Thomas French – (Democratic Services Officer, Committees,  
Governance)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Abdul Malik.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS**

Nil items.

**3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

Councillor Marc Francis raised two issues with the minutes of 26 September 2022

1. Follow up report on the Gill Street Scheme on Item 5
2. To correct the request on performance data on Item 6.

The Chair agreed to these changes and the Chair Moved and it was:-

## **RESOLVED**

That the unrestricted minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 September 2022 and 24 October 2022 approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

### **4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items.

### **5. ACTION LOG**

The committee noted the updated Action Log and the Committee.

### **6. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

The Committee noted:

1. The most recent editions of the Forward Plan.
2. The Forthcoming Decisions Plan (or 'Forward Plan') is published at least 28 days before each Cabinet meeting setting out information on all the Key Decisions that are expected to be taken at that meeting, along with other Cabinet decisions where known.
3. Publication dates for future Forthcoming Decision Plans are available on the Cabinet web pages. In advance of being published on the new Plan, individual notices of new Key Decisions will be published as they are known and these are listed as New Issues.

### **7. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

#### **7.1 CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS**

The committee considered a presentation Customer Service, presented by Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding and Lead for Customer Services and Raj Chand, Director of Customer Services. A copy of the presentation can be found in the agenda pack.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- With the new Town Hall being used as a main residents' hub, how has this been communicated to residents and what can members of the committee do to better promote this? Councillor Kabir Ahmed stated that while there will be a large resident's hub within the new town hall, there will also be five more across the borough still for residents to access. The residents' hubs will have increased services than the previous one stop shops and will be in place of the current ideas' stores. Raj Chand recommended that members talk to residents,

especially vulnerable residents about the new residents' hubs and the services that they run.

- What is being done to ensure that complaints are being dealt with and not ignored? Raj Chand stated that feedback and data is generated about how complaints are dealt with and currently around 80 per cent of complaints are dealt with, within the target time. Further work is being done to ensure that this is improved on, along with feedback to services on lessons being learnt from complaints.
- What is the council doing to ensure our services are benchmarked against other councils? Raj Chand detailed that while the council has learnt from what other councils are doing, it was also important to put on a local service that was personal to the borough.
- How does the council capture unanswered calls, currently there are reported 25,000 calls have gone unanswered? Raj Chand detailed how the council measures calls which are classified as abandoned. While reporting can see where services need to improve, the current issue is the hunt system for calling around services, which the council is seeking to fix and improve. A new system would allow for calling residents back and resolving outstanding issues.
- What is collected on different services and their response rate to calls? Raj Chand stated that many services are reviewed based on their response rate and the benefits team are particularly under a great deal of pressure right now. Customer feedback will be presented back to members on a quarterly basis, but the new strategy will increase this to detail and breakdown data on different parts of the council
- There have been complaints about the Love Your Neighbourhood app. Raj Chand agreed to look into issues with the app. But the council is growing its online engagement with how young people are able to access services on smart phones, along with the council website.
- Improvements to how residents are able to upload documents needs to be included in the new digital infrastructure, but also ensuring the paper forms are still accessible, like medical forms. Councillor Kabir Ahmed stated that as the council has moved towards being paperless, paper forms are less commonly stocked. But while the council is still working out what will be stocked at the new residents' hubs, residents will have the ability to have forms printed in some way.
- Will there be more intelligent design based on how residents wish to access council services? Will there be long term plans built in to ensure the service changes as residents engage with the council? Raj Chand agreed that services should be built around the need of residents and that is where the new strategy is heading. The current pathways of support for different residents is always evolving and will continue to grow around residents. Councillor Kabir Ahmed stated that after Covid-19 and currently in the cost-of-living crisis right now, demands are always shifting. But the council is always learning and improving to build better services.
- How can we ensure that residents be met with dignity and understanding when they approach the council with a sensitive issue? Councillor Kabir Ahmed agreed that dignity was important and that training for those in customer service

roles will be given to ensure they are engaging with residents correctly in these situations.

- How will staffing work in the new residents' hubs? Councillor Kabir Ahmed stated that there will be investment in staff and based on the expected services at the hubs, the staffing will be moulded based on this. There will also be space for partner organisations, who will also be there to support residents.
- Only 26 per cent of enquiries are dealt with first time, can you explain why this is low? Raj Chand agreed that it was low, but there will be improvement on this and as the pathways are more formalised, allowing for more partners to be involved, more issues can be dealt with, first time.
- For those who are trying to access services digitally but are finding they are now getting a positive outcome, what can the council do to improve on this? Raj Chand acknowledged some of the issues that can be found accessing services online. There are around 40,000 forms that residents can potentially access, and some of these are not as prompt in ensuring a response is generated.
- Will the potential of Tower Hamlets Homes coming inhouse, has this been factored into customer service demand? Councillor Kabir Ahmed explained the current process of bringing this service inhouse but stated that many of the customer service systems are shared, many residents will not see the difference to how their customer service works.
- It is important to see improvements in customer services and especially after years of cost saving exercises across the council. But this is also in a climate where many lessons this committee has previously tried to make the council learn, have been ignored.
- It would be helpful to be able to see the abandoned phone call data, on a monthly basis. Further to this, it would be helpful to see what other matrix the council measures against. Raj Chand detailed how the council works on the feedback it gets, including quality assurance that currently happens and is planned going forward. Raj Chand agreed to provide abandoned call data and other data collection to the committee.
- What are the extra resources that will be put into the new resident hubs to ensure residents are supported to access council services? How will this be funded? Councillor Kabir Ahmed stated that in the residents' hubs there will be staff there to support residents in person. The council is currently identifying how much resource each residents' hub will need, and it will be done on a location by location basis.
- How does the council contact those who are not able to have their enquiry answered? Raj Chand explained the process of getting back to residents, highlighting how the call back time has fallen and how quick responses are provided on social media.
- The council social media has been very positive and helped members with enquiries.
- Does the council keep a log of a resident's issues, so when issues are followed up, the council can see all their history to avoid the resident repeating their concerns? Raj Chand agreed that it would be helpful to have this function, however the council runs many services and often use different IT system, that

do not work together. Some integration is possible, and it is an area the council is working on to improve as systems improve.

The chair thanked Raj Chand and Councillor Kabir Ahmed for attending and presenting. The chair summed up the main themes of the discussion.

1. There are concerns with the support residents are getting from customer service
2. The Council currently and through the new strategy are trying to improve the positive experience of residents
3. The local picture is important when looking at how resources should be used
4. The shortcomings of the hunt system and how a new system is needed
5. There is zero tolerance in compromising the standard of service for residents.
6. The publicity and promotion of the new residents' hubs.

## RESOLVED

1. The presentation be noted.

## **8. WORK PROGRAMME**

### **8.1 OSC WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee noted scrutiny work programme.

## **9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**

The Chair asked that members inform him of any particular questions that they wanted to be raised with the Mayor in Cabinet on the 30 November 2022.

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

Nil items.

### **10.1 UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

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

## **11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

As the agenda circulated had no exempt/confidential reports and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration

## **12. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS**

Nil items.

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

**13.1 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS TO SUB COMMITTEES**

Joel West, Committee Services Team Leader presented the urgent report on the co-opted parent governor role for Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee and the Healthwatch Tower Hamlets' nominee to the Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub Committee.

**RESOLVED**

The Committee agreed to:

1. Agreed the appointment of Nasifa Ahmed to the position of Parent Governor representative on the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee for the period of the current administration.
2. Agreed the appointment of Matthew Adrien to the position of Healthwatch Tower Hamlets representative to the Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub Committee for the period of the current administration or until Healthwatch advises the Council of a change to its nominee, whichever is sooner.

The meeting ended at 8.43 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee