


Non-Executive Report of the: Full Council 2 nd October 2024	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director of Resources	Classification: Open
Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24	

Originating Officer(s)	Afazul Hoque Head of Corporate Strategy and Communities Filuck Miah Senior Strategy and Policy Officer
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the work that Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), it's sub-committees and scrutiny leads delivered in 2023-24 municipal year

Recommendations:

The Full Council is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the OSC Annual Report.

1. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 The council's constitution requires that the OSC must report annually to Full Council on its work.

2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 To take no action. This is not recommended as the council's constitution requires OSC to report annually to Full Council on its work.

3. **DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 The council's constitution requires OSC to report annually to Full Council, evidencing the committees' activities during the past year and include the work of its sub-committees. The attached report provides a summary of the range of activities and work that scrutiny carried out last municipal year.

- 3.2 OSC and its sub-committees focused on areas of strategic priorities to ensure residents' concerns were reflected. OSC kept oversight of the council's budget and submitted recommendations for the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and strategic performance throughout the year. OSC carried out key scrutiny reviews focussing on current boroughwide issues including how the council can better support street markets and traders.
- 3.3 OSC also held spotlights examining topics of residents' concerns such as insourcing of leisure services, Mayor's Community Grants programme, Violence Against Women and Girls, parking management, community engagement and the Mayor and Cabinet Member spotlights.
- 3.4 The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee (CESSC) scrutinised key areas focusing on educational policies, including the implementation of universal free school meals and the support for children with special educational needs. The committee's focus on these areas is critical for ensuring that educational provisions are equitable and effective. CESSC carried out five site visits to local secondary schools to better understand key issues and inform their questioning at meetings. The Committee held a scrutiny challenge session and considered child healthy weight in the borough.
- 3.5 The Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee played a vital role in scrutinising healthcare access, particularly for disabled residents and those with long-term health conditions. Their work included examining hospital waiting times, accessibility of community diagnostic services, and the inclusivity of sports and fitness initiatives. The Committee met with a range of stakeholders to inform their review of provision for disabled residents, engaging with residents from the council's commissioned services such as disability people's network and older peoples reference group to understand their needs and views.
- 3.6 The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee evaluated the performance of housing providers, the impact of new legislation, and the progress towards key housing goals such as building new homes and addressing fire safety. This scrutiny ensured that housing services were meeting the needs of residents and complying with new regulatory standards
- 3.7 The Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety focused on how the Council can better support the markets in the borough. The review has made a number of recommendations on how this support can be enhanced.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 In delivering the scrutiny work programme, the committee affirmed its commitment to addressing equality concerns including the significance of promoting fairness, inclusivity, and tackling disparities among diverse groups within the borough.

- 4.2 The Committee's work programme was informed by the Borough Equality Assessment (BEA) and the latest census data, which guided them on key equality issues to consider as topics for scrutiny. The data-driven approach allowed members to consider the unique challenges and requirements of various communities in the borough. The committee considered matters related to gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and socio-economic status. This enabled them to identify areas where particular communities might be at a disadvantage or experiencing underrepresentation.
- 4.3 Feedback from commissioned equality hub provision, including the disabled people's network, also helped to inform the committee's considerations such as the ongoing challenges related to access to health services and physical exercise for disabled individuals within the borough and included in the work programme. Members also recognised gender-related concerns such as women's safety provisions and the committee reviewed the new violence against women and girls' strategy. Members engagement with their constituents also highlighted some of the inequalities that BAME women faced with access to local maternity services. Moreover, the committee's focus on public health data and engagement with senior council officers revealed disparities in breast and bowel cancer screening uptake among BAME groups. This issue was incorporated into the committee's work programme to explore potential underlying health inequalities contributing to this trend.
- 4.4 A dedicated spotlight on the cost-of-living challenge was featured on the committee's work programme. Members questioned the effect of the council and partner support on disadvantaged communities, including policies like free school meals. As a critical friend, the committee addressed strategic concerns linked to housing access, overcrowding, and homelessness and include matters such as housing targets. The committee's scope also included education inequalities and university access for disadvantaged young people in the borough. The committee addressed the importance of fostering a reflective workforce and tackling underrepresentation or disadvantage within specific communities.
- 4.5 Integrating equality considerations into the scrutiny work programme enabled the committee to embrace the diverse needs and aspirations of residents and contribute to building a more cohesive and robust community in Tower Hamlets.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no direct financial arising from the recommendations in this report

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 This report complies with the Council's constitutional requirements.
- 7.2 There are no other legal issues arising directly from this report

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A