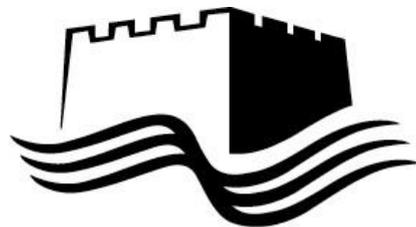


**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER
HAMLETS OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REVIEW OF THE BUDGET
PROPOSALS FOR 2017-20**



TOWER HAMLETS

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Introduction from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Our Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has spent the last month delving in to the finer detail of Mayor John Biggs's budget proposals. Making almost £60m in savings over the next three years is a huge challenge and tough decisions have been proposed which will have an impact on the people and communities we service and our staff.

The casual observer may assume that you can judge the success of a Council service by the level of investment. During this process we have seen examples of how funding and investment have not always delivered the best outcomes for local people. During our discussions, we learned that the Council's departments had become siloes and this approach had a financial burden. Other Councils have been more strategic in their approach and have simply got more bang for the buck. Tower Hamlets Council must ensure that every penny delivers for the people we service.

OSC welcomes the improvement to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. We fully support the Council's introduction of the Outcomes Based Budgeting (OBB) methodology and the three year budget planning process. We hope this approach will enable the Council to deliver more efficient and effective services to the local community.

We support the service and mayoral growth proposals to meet demographic and budget pressures in adult social care, services for looked after children and our leaving care service. And proposed investment in services to prevent radicalisation and support our care leavers, along with initiatives to support 50+ adults into employment. These proposals will help the most vulnerable in our community. While further investment in waste collection and treatment, initiatives to improve air quality and our public realm will make Tower Hamlets a better place to live. We strongly commend the Council's investment in a £5m tackling poverty fund and its decision to continue to fully fund our Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme at a £24m cost.

Our Committee is dedicated to ensuring this new approach enhances openness, accountability and transparency in the town hall. We noted Mayor John Biggs full attendance and participation in our three scrutiny sessions. We also acknowledged the improvements had been made with the nature of our public consultation, particularly in the way the Council has asked local people to give their priorities for how the Council should make savings.

The Committee appreciated the extra support and training Committee members received to empower them to effectively scrutinise the Mayor's proposals. We would like to thank all of the Council officers and Centre for Public Scrutiny who supported us to scrutinise the three year budget on behalf of the people of Tower Hamlets.

Councillor John Pierce

Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

January 2017

Summary Recommendations

General/Strategic approach

- 1) That the Committee supports the application of the Outcomes Based Budgeting (OBB) methodology and three year budget planning process allied to the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Committee believes that this approach will enable the Council to deliver more efficient and effective services to the local community.**
- 2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are provided with detailed information on scheduling and indicative timetabling for the development of implementation options for all of the Growth and Savings Proposals in the Budget Proposal by 31 March 2017. This will enable the Committee to have early input and scrutiny of the development of business cases and options by effective sequencing of these business case proposals into its annual work programme.**
- 3) That prior to implementing changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme the Council carries out a full risk assessment with a particular focus on the development of mitigation measures and approaches including outreach work to support those affected by the changes. That the Committee is provided with a copy of this assessment to review and scrutinise.**
- 4) That there are no additional changes to Adult Education fees and charges other than inflationary increases.**
- 5) That the Council considers the development of options to cross subsidise the Dedicated Schools Budget for school nursery places or examine further investment opportunities to minimise the impact of changes and reductions to this budget. That the Committee are provided with the opportunity to review and scrutinise these options.**
- 6) That specific engagement is undertaken with people impacted by savings proposals using a range of channels and approaches to ensure that all sections of the community are able to participate and be represented.**
- 7) That in the development of the growth proposals local people are engaged and involved in the co-design and delivery of the options and plans.**
- 8) That the Committee is provided with the overall engagement and consultation approach and programme for further review and scrutiny.**

Savings proposals

- 9) That any changes to “Helping People with a Learning Disability to live independently” provision reflect the wishes of those in receipt of care and their families and carers, through an effective engagement and consultation programme. A commitment from the Council that no person who is placed outside of the borough and is settled in that community is forced to move back to Tower Hamlets as a result of this proposal.**
- 10) That the new service model for Youth Services aims to provide greater access for a diverse range of young people in particular improving the number of young girls accessing the service.**
- 11) That outcomes based performance indicators be developed to measure and monitor the impact of the Youth Service on the aspirations, health and wellbeing of young people in the borough.**
- 12) That the views of local Ward Councillors are used to inform the development of the options and proposals for the redesign of the Safer Communities function. With particular focus on the role of the Rapid Response team.**
- 13) That the needs of children and parents are at the core of the revised Early Years’ offer, and that effective planning and risk assessment is carried out in planning the impact of the transition of services for current service users.**
- 14) That the development of Early Years’ delivery models maximises the opportunities for additional external funding.**
- 15) That there is a commitment that the future makeup of the workforce for the Early Years’ Service is representative of local community.**
- 16) That the Committee will review the development of Early Years’ options and proposals at its meeting in July 2017.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is developing a three year budget which will align the Medium Term Financial Plan with the delivery of Strategic Plan priority outcomes. This is supported by a new Outcomes Based Budgeting framework and approach. The move to Outcomes Based Budgeting is new to the Council and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 The Council has carried out an extensive range of community engagement and consultation work to inform the overall strategic approach to the budget. This included the 'Your Borough Your Future' campaign which was designed to run over the next three years and involve the public in the process. The approach this year consisted of a general consultation on budget principles and what was important to people which informed the strategic budget approach. With linked service specific consultations as the Council considered significant changes to specific services, with the first of these at the end of 2016 examining options and views on a Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- 1.3 The scrutiny of the budget proposals by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee this year was carried out in the context of significant changes to both the nature and levels of funding the Council receives from the Government and other sources.
- 1.4 Linked inflationary and service demand pressures and the change in Government funding has resulted in a potential budget shortfall of £58million for the three year period 2017-2020. With a significant part of the shortfall, impacting on the budget proposals for the financial year 2017-18.
- 1.5 The Council's approach to identification of risk and the overall Treasury Management approach contained in the Medium Term Financial Plan has also been impacted by the economic outlook both nationally and regionally and the on-going uncertainty of the potential impact of the result of the Referendum on the UK's Membership of the European Union in 2016.
- 1.6 The Council worked with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) in developing a support package for the budget scrutiny process, which included a workshop for elected members serving on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee which contained an overview introduction to the Council's financial planning and budget setting process and an opportunity to consider their priorities and approach. In addition CFPS provided support for the Chair of the committee and a range of tools and techniques which Councillors used to manage the budget scrutiny process and interrogate specific elements of the budget proposal.

2. Approach to Budget Scrutiny for 2017/18.

- 2.1 The Committee developed an approach to budget scrutiny this year which enabled them to take a strategic overview of the risks associated with the deliverability of the savings plan and the potential impact of the proposals on Tower Hamlets' communities.
- 2.2 The Committee reviewed the Budget Proposals in two formal meetings and an informal workshop during January 2017. This approach although somewhat concentrated into three weeks in January, did ensure that the Committee were able to gather a range of evidence on both the strategic elements of the proposal and carry out an in depth review of a smaller number of key growth and savings business cases.
- 2.3 The division of the work is outlined below:
 - Session One- Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting 4 January 2017– **Strategic Overview of the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget Proposals and Transformation Proposals/Determine focus for in depth scrutiny**
 - Session Two – Informal Evidence gathering workshop 16 January 2017 – **In Depth Scrutiny of Growth and Savings business cases**
 - Session Three - Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 23 January 2017 – **Further In Depth Scrutiny of Business cases /Analysis of evidence and development of recommendations**
- 2.4 The evidence was gathered through a mixture of approaches and sources including detailed review and analysis of the Budget Proposal documents, and an approach to questioning informed by CFPS best practice, which was both strategic in intent and forensic and focused in delivery.
- 2.5 The Committee also requested a wide range of additional information to help inform the development of their recommendations, including contextual data on population and employment growth, detailed comparative financial and service benchmarking information and detailed analysis of the basis for and impact of specific recommendations.
- 2.6 At the end of the process councillors reviewed the range of evidence sources and information provided and used these to identify the main issues and concerns for the Committee, for both the key strategic elements of the Budget Proposals and in respect of specific savings proposals. These issues and concerns were then debated by the Committee and used as the basis for the development of the Committee's recommendations.

3.0 Session one - Strategic Overview 4 January 2017

3.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:

Name	Role
Councillor John Pierce	Chair of OSC
Councillor Clare Harrisson	Scrutiny Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaquim	OSC member
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	OSC Deputy
Councillor Denise Jones	OSC Deputy
Councillor Andrew Wood	OSC Deputy
Councillor Danny Hassell	OSC Deputy
Co-opted Member Victoria Ekubia	Roman Catholic Diocese Representative
Co-opted Member Dr Philip Rice	Church of England Diocese representative

3.2 For this initial session the Committee took a strategic approach, looking at the overall budget package, key drivers for change and the proposed approach to transformation. This included review and consideration of the Mayor's strategic approach and the links between the proposed budget, Medium Term Financial Plan, Treasury Management approach and the refreshed Strategic Plan.

3.3 The Committee also reviewed the nature of the financial resources used to fund the budget, including council tax and business rates, reserves policy, schools' funding, Capital and specific Housing and Dedicated schools budgets and the robustness of the approach to risk management. There then followed a review of the budget pressures and proposed growth allocations along with an overview of the extensive range of savings proposals.

3.4 The Committee agreed that the suggested focus and lens for the in depth review of specific growth and savings business cases should be on the following priority areas:

- Enabling growth in the borough; and
- Prevention and proactive initiatives.

3.5 In addition that the approach for the in depth reviews should be in determining: Firstly that the proposed outcomes are clear and appropriate and that the evidence base and rationale is robust, and to consider areas of significant risk and the robustness of the mitigation measures.

3.6 Committee members then used the following criteria to determine the most appropriate budget areas for further in depth scrutiny at the informal workshop session on 16 January 2017:

- **Timing of implementation** - Prioritising Business Cases with early implementation in the 2017/18 budget year
- **Size and scale of the budget area** - Focusing on larger budget areas and significant elements of change to the existing budget base
- **Wider community impact/access to services** - Business cases which are likely to impact on the wider Tower Hamlets community ,and could result in a restriction of access to services
- **Scale of Risk** - Both the risk to the achievement of the proposal and the wider impact on delivering overall budget savings
- **Equality impact** - Proposals that are likely to have a significant impact on specific sections of our communities and the protected characteristics

4.0 **Session Two - Informal workshop in depth Review of Business cases 16 January 2017**

4.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:

Name	Role
Councillor John Pierce	Chair of OSC
Councillor Clare Harrisson	Scrutiny Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim	OSC member
Councillor Ohid Ahmed	OSC Deputy
Councillor Denise Jones	OSC deputy
Councillor Julia Dockerill	Scrutiny lead for Children's services
Councillor Andrew Wood	OSC Deputy
Co-opted Members Victoria Ekubia	Roman Catholic Diocese Representative

4.2 The Committee used this informal session to gather evidence to inform the development of their recommendations at the subsequent formal Committee meeting on 23 January 2017.

4.3 In reviewing the range of savings proposals, the Committee used a range of questioning techniques to determine if the overall approach to risk was consistent, robust and did it focus on both the individual proposal and the impact in delivering the overall budget. They also looked at the range of choices and options that were considered in developing the final proposals and the basis for those decisions.

- 4.4 There was also significant focus on the impact of individual proposals on local citizens and staff, and the level of consultation and engagement with those affected by the proposed changes.
- 4.5 The wider impact of the proposals was also considered with a focus on the proposed result of the change, the knock on effect on other elements of the budget, our partners, and any potential consequences elsewhere in the community, the Tower Hamlets environment and dependent social systems.
- 4.6 The following savings proposals were reviewed:
- Helping people with a learning disability to live independently
 - Youth Service Transformation
 - Widening participation in early years
 - Purchase of Private sector homes (General Fund)
 - Service redesign – Safer Communities
 - Centralisation of finance
- 4.7 Following the review of the savings proposals the Committee requested additional information relating to each of the proposals. This included copies of the equality impact assessments carried out to assess the impact of the proposals, cost and service comparator data and detail of the expected community outcomes and supporting metrics and monitoring arrangements.
- 4.8 The Committee also considered a range of budget pressure and growth proposals, including budget pressures and re basing of certain elements of the budget, service demand and inflationary pressures and growth bids relating to the delivery of the Mayor’s priorities.
- 4.9 The approach to the scrutiny of these growth bids consisted of detailed questioning of the basis of the bid and consideration of alternative options. The Committee also sought to ascertain the specific quantifiable outcomes from each proposal. In depth scrutiny focused on all of the following growth bid proposals:
- Looked after Children
 - Leaving Care service (Assessment & Early Intervention)
 - Supporting our care leavers to find work
 - Preventing Radicalism
 - Supporting residents aged 50 +into employment
 - Safeguarding budget pressures in Adult Social care
 - Unallocated Growth
 - Creating community hubs
 - Providing free Wifi in Tower Hamlets for all
 - Waste Collection and treatment
 - Incentivising better waste collection housing estates

5.0 Session Three – Further review of Business Cases, Analysis of Information and Development of Recommendations - 23 January 2017

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:

Name	Role
Councillor John Pierce	Chair of OSC
Councillor Clare Harrison	Scrutiny Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaquim	OSC member
Councillor MD. Maium Miah	OSC Deputy
Councillor Denise Jones	OSC deputy
Councillor Julia Dockerill	Scrutiny lead for Children's services
Councillor Helal Uddin	OSC Member
Councillor Amina Ali	Scrutiny lead for Dev. And Renewal
Councillor Abdul Asad	OSC Member
Co-opted Member- Victoria Ekubia	Roman Catholic Diocese Representative
Co-opted Member- Dr Philip Rice	Church of England Diocese Representative
Co-opted Member- Asad M Jaman	Muslim Faith community
Co-opted Member- Shabbir Ahmed Chowdhury	Parent Governor representative
Co-opted Member- Christine Trumper	Parent Governor representative
Co-opted Member-Fatiha Kassouri	Parent Governor representative

5.2 This meeting provided the Committee with the opportunity to review the evidence and information provided across the two previous sessions, and to consider and interrogate the additional information provided following the in depth review of savings proposals at the informal workshop on 16 January 2017.

5.3 Initially the Committee considered the overall strategic approach to the budget and the financial and economic context. The Mayor and Cabinet Member for Resources explained the context and rationale for the range of options considered in determining funding resources, fees and charges, approaches to risk, "Outcomes Based Budgeting" and the reserves policy. The Committee then carried out further in depth review of the Early Years Savings proposal and the responses to requests for additional information.

5.4 The Chair provided the Committee with a summary of the budget scrutiny journey during January 2017, over three separate scrutiny sessions, listing the approach taken, key evidence sources and the areas of focus for the in depth scrutiny reviews.

6.0 Developing the Committee's recommendations

- 6.1 In developing the range of recommendations the Committee firstly considered the strategic aspects of the budget proposals. The Chair provided a summary of key issues and facilitated a discussion which resulted in agreeing a range of issues and concerns for the Committee; these were then developed into recommendations through discussion and agreement. A similar approach was taken with regard to the in depth review of the evidence for the business cases for the savings proposals.
- 6.2 The Committee having reviewed a number of representative growth bids supported the overall approach and specific proposals. They also expressed a desire to carry out further scrutiny reviews of the achievement of the proposed outcomes for selected proposals in their programme of work for 2017/18.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Committee supports the application of the Outcomes Based Budgeting (OBB) methodology and three year budget planning process allied to the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Committee believes that this approach will enable the Council to deliver more efficient and effective services to the local community.

Recommendation 2: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are provided with detailed information on scheduling and indicative timetabling for the development of implementation options for all of the Growth and Savings Proposals in the Budget Proposal by 31 March 2017. This will enable the Committee to have early input and scrutiny of the development of business cases and options by effective sequencing of these business case proposals into its annual work programme.

- 6.3 The Committee was provided with the rationale and strategic context for the Budget Proposal and Outcomes Based Budgeting approach. They felt that the rationale and basis for the approach was compelling; there were however concerns at the level of openness and robustness of the process, particularly as many of the business cases did not have clearly defined outcomes at this stage.
- 6.4 Whilst supporting and embracing the new approach the Committee had concerns regarding the level of detail on the outputs from some of the service redesign proposals and the expected improved outcomes for Tower Hamlets citizens. The savings and growth approach did appear to create a somewhat siloed approach, which did not always take into account cross cutting themes and community based outcomes
- 6.5 The Committee also felt that the approach to risk across the budget process was at times inconsistent, which could impact on the achievement of the agreed levels of savings and service changes required.

Recommendation 3: That prior to implementing changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme the council carries out a full risk assessment with a particular focus on the development of mitigation measures and approaches including outreach work to support those affected by the changes. That the Committee is provided with a copy of this assessment to review and scrutinise.

- 6.6 The Committee recognised that this decision is a separate but complementary decision to be taken by a meeting of the Full Council, and welcome the commitment to retain the current position in respect of those vulnerable households receiving 100% reduction in Council Tax liability.
- 6.7 However the Committee raised significant concerns regarding the potential impact of the proposed changes to the Council Tax reduction Scheme, particularly in the context of the ongoing Welfare and Benefits changes being introduced by Central Government at this time.
- 6.8 There are also concerns at the level and range of information currently available on the impact of the proposed changes, and the levels of revenue associated with each change along with potential collection /bad debt issues.

Recommendation 4: That there are no additional changes to Adult Education fees and charges other than inflationary increases.

- 6.9 The Committee recognised and supported the cautious approach taken to increasing existing Fees and Charges and introducing new or additional charges for the current range of services offered to Tower Hamlets residents in this Budget Proposal.
- 6.10 The Committee wanted to ensure that linkages and dependencies were identified across the budget planning process, an example of which is the affordability of adult education provision, as a driver of both economic growth and the improved employability of Tower Hamlets residents.

Recommendation 5: That the Council considers the development of options to cross subsidise the Dedicated Schools Budget for school nursery places or examine further investment opportunities to minimise the impact of changes and reductions to this budget. That the Committee are provided with the opportunity to review and scrutinise these options.

- 6.11 The Committee understands the challenges facing local schools in the borough due to changes in the format and levels of funding they will receive through the Dedicated Schools Budget. This is compounded by the nature of the funding formula and increasing demand for school places in many areas.

6.12 The Committee would like the Council to explore potential opportunities and options for supporting local schools as a key element of the Mayor's Strategic Priorities, particularly in respect of nursery places.

Recommendation 6: That specific engagement is undertaken with people impacted by savings proposals using a range of channels and approaches to ensure that all sections of the community are able to participate and be represented.

Recommendation 7: That in the development of the growth proposals local people are engaged and involved in the co-design and delivery of the options and plans.

Recommendation 8: That the Committee is provided with the overall engagement and consultation approach and programme for further review and scrutiny.

6.13 The Committee understands that the approach taken this year in involving local communities in the development of the budget proposals, has had some success in helping to inform the overall strategic direction and Budget Proposal this year. There are however examples of certain local communities who did not have any involvement in this process, due to either the accessibility of channels for engagement or the level of granulation in the sample.

6.14 The Committee recognised the value of the service specific engagement activity undertaken to inform the Council Tax Reduction Scheme proposal, and would like to see this replicated, using appropriate engagement approaches, channels and audiences across the range of growth and savings proposals.

6.15 The Committee would also like to explore opportunities for future involvement as the three year cycle gets under way, and would like to help to design more fundamental and substantial member involvement in 2017/18 and beyond.

Recommendation 9: That any changes to "Helping People with a Learning Disability to live independently" provision reflect the wishes of those in receipt of care and their families and carers, through an effective engagement and consultation programme. A commitment from the Council that no person who is placed outside of the borough and is settled in that community is forced to move back to Tower Hamlets as a result of this proposal.

6.16 The Committee was provided with the basis for the business case proposal along with detailed information on the formulation and development of the implementation plans, and associated work streams in respect of the savings proposal. Benchmarking information and cost comparison data also provided Councillors with background as to the rationale for the savings proposal.

- 6.17 Given the individual nature of both the needs of the service users, and the differing circumstances of the historical offer from the Council for this service, the Committee felt that there could not be a single approach to this plan and that each case should be looked at individually. In addition the development of alternative plans needed to fully engage with the each service user's requirements and aspirations and listen to the views of families and carers in their advocacy role.
- 6.18 The Committee had significant concerns in respect of the potential detrimental impact of forcing vulnerable customers to move back to the borough for purely economic reasons, and the significant impact that this forced move could have on their personal health and well-being.

Recommendation 10: That the new service model for Youth Services aims to provide greater access for diverse range of young people in particular improving the number of young girls accessing the service.

Recommendation 11: That outcomes based performance indicators be developed to measure and monitor the impact of the Youth Service on the aspirations, health and wellbeing of young people in the borough.

- 6.19 The Committee understands that the need for a restructure of the Youth Service is part of a three year vision to become the best youth service in London. In addition that the analysis of cost and service benchmarking comparators with other London boroughs has led in part to this proposal being put forward. The business case sets out a restructure of the integrated Youth and Community service, designed to maintain the level of delivery in the interim model and to aim to improve future delivery through professionalising the workforce.
- 6.20 Councillors had concerns that the emerging service model had the potential for segregating elements of the youth community in the borough, in the proposed service offer, either by gender or sexual orientation. The Committee also questioned the robustness of the emerging performance outcomes for the service and the linkages to other services and initiatives.
- 6.21 The Committee requested additional information on the impact of proposed changes on the existing workforce and oversight of detailed equality impact assessment documentation.

Recommendation 12: That the views of local Ward Councillors are used to inform the development of the options and proposals for the redesign of the Safer Communities function. With particular focus on the role of the Rapid Response team.

- 6.22 The Committee reviewed the detail of the savings proposal with a particular focus on the proposed changes to the Rapid Response Team. The Committee supported the overall approach in better aligning the work of the team with the Council's Strategic Priorities and delivering "quick win 'efficiency savings (i.e. deleting vacant posts).
- 6.23 The Committee focused on the work of the Rapid Response Team and the importance of linking this review with a holistic approach to community safety, dovetailing with the work of other statutory agencies in the field. The importance of the ward councillor role as an advocate for the communities and corporate voice of the Council was raised, with particular emphasis on their role in providing community information and intelligence.

Recommendation 13: That the needs of children and parents are at the core of the revised Early Years' offer, and that effective planning and risk assessment is carried out in planning the impact of the transition of services for current service users.
Recommendation 14: That the development of Early Years' delivery models maximises the opportunities for additional external funding.
Recommendation 15: That there is a commitment that the future makeup of the workforce for the Early Years' Service is representative of local community.
Recommendation 16: That the Committee will review the development of Early Years' options and proposals at its meeting in July 2017.

- 6.24 The Committee carried out an in-depth review of this proposal over two meetings and was also provided with a range of additional information and data to help inform these recommendations. The initial concerns related to the level of detailed information on the nature of the proposal and a lack of clarity as to where and how the savings would be delivered.
- 6.25 The additional information which was provided and the proposed timescale for the bulk of the changes helped to allay those fears at this stage; however the Committee sought a commitment that the new service model achieved at least the same standards and quality as currently provided.
- 6.26 The Committee also recognised the value of the current staff/client relationships and was keen to ensure that these are maintained with new providers and that the impact on service users is considered when developing implementation plans.