

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2011**

Councillors Councillors Bull (Chair), Browne (Vice-Chair), Alexander, Basu, Ejiofor, Newton and Winskill

Apologies Yvonne Denny (Church Representative) and Helena Kania (LINK)

Also Present: **Co-optees:** Sarah Marsh (Parent Governor Representative) and Marcelle Jemide (Parent Governor Representative)

Councillors: John Bevan, Joe Goldberg

Officers: Julie Parker (Director Corporate Resources), Kevin Bartle (Chief Finance Officer), Mustafa Ibrahim (Strategic & Community Housing – Service Improvement Manager), Denise Gandy (Head of Housing Support & Options), Marc Dorfman (Assistant Director – Planning, Regeneration and Economy), Doris Acquah (ALMO Clients Manager), Jackie Thomas (Director – Housing Management, Homes for Haringey), Margaret Gallagher (Performance Management Team Manager), Debbie Haith (Deputy Director – Children & Families), Steve Russell (Homes for Haringey - Housing Improvement Team), Len Weir (Head of Provider Service- Older people/Mental Health), Beverley Tarka (Head of Learning Disabilities – Adult)

**MINUTE
NO.**

SUBJECT/DECISION

OSCO168.	WEBCASTING NOTED that the meeting was recorded for future or live broadcasting on the Council's website.
OSCO169.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Yvonne Denny (Church Representative) and Helena Kania (LINK Representative). Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Browne and Ejiofor.
OSCO170.	URGENT BUSINESS NONE.
OSCO171.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST The Chair and Councillor Winskill declared personal interests in agenda items 6 (Cabinet Member for Housing Questions) and 7 (Homes for Haringey Inspection Report) as both were Haringey Council leaseholders.
OSCO172.	DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS There were no such items.
OSCO173.	CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

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The Committee received the portfolio briefing from Councillor John Bevan, Cabinet Member for Housing and written responses to advance questions and noted the responses to supplementary questions below.

Councillor Bevan reported that Haringey had received the outcome of its bid for Decent Homes funding which included guaranteed funding for the next two years (although less than previously allocated) and indicated funding for 2013/14. The reduced funding meant that some of the planned decent homes work would not be conducted. The Council would consult with tenants on the options when deciding what works should take place. The Council could also bid for funding to contribute towards making estates more energy efficient to tie into the Decent Homes projects.

Re: Q1 – Void Properties – The Committee noted that void turnaround times of Council properties was down to an average of 19.8 days; this was slightly longer for sheltered housing properties. In response to questions it was noted that this was down to better co-operation between the Council and Homes for Haringey. The Cabinet Member would be consulting with Homes for Haringey and Haringey Housing staff to gain their views on what has worked and what else could be done to improve services.

Re: Q2 – Under Occupation - The allocations service had also made substantial improvements and the Council was moving quickly to free up under occupied properties. The Cabinet Member stressed that the allocation of Haringey housing, along with housing association and private sector housing allocations, would remain within the Council's control and would not be transferred to Homes for Haringey.

Re: Q3 – Homelessness - The Committee noted that the Council was implementing the changes to the Local Housing Allowance. Council officers were liaising with government officers with the involvement of London Councils to try to ensure, as far as possible, that other boroughs did not move housing tenants to Haringey as a cheaper option. In response to a question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that where a person on benefits was under occupying a property their housing benefit would be reduced, which should encourage them to move into smaller properties so that the benefit would cover the entire rent.

Re: Q10 – Temporary Accommodation – The Committee were concerned that less than 200 of the 700 temporary accommodation homes promised by the three housing associations and six private housing suppliers had been built. It was noted that the Government had reduced funding since the target of 700 new homes was set and so these providers were no longer able to conduct work that was initially intended. The Committee noted that the Council would currently not pursue the possibility of placing homeless households in less expensive areas outside London.

The Cabinet Member suggested that the Homes and Communities Agency Report on affordable housing estimates be circulated to the Committee (Action No. 173.1).

Re: Q11 - The Committee noted that if the licensing scheme for Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) was agreed by the Cabinet in June it would start on

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	<p>1st October 2011 with landlords being required to obtain a HMO license in advance of renting out the property.</p> <p>RESOLVED to note the briefing.</p>
<p>OSCO174.</p>	<p>HOMES FOR HARINGEY INSPECTION REPORT</p> <p>The Committee received the Homes for Haringey report on the inspection by the Audit Commission in June –July 2010, introduced by Sue Hunter (Homes for Haringey (HfH) – Business Improvement Manager) and Doris Acquah (ALMO Clients Manager).</p> <p>The Committee discussed concerns about squatters taking over void properties and noted that some deterrents were in place for example HfH staff tried to ensure that empty properties looked as though they were inhabited e.g. curtains hanging, and also that boilers and other utilities were disconnected. Properties that staff perceived as vulnerable to squatting had security doors, window screens and sometimes alarms fitted, although some squatters had the equipment to get through such security measures. Investigation into the possibility of using house-sitters was being conducted but this solution would mean associated costs.</p> <p>In response to a question on what happened if a tenant refused decent homes work to the property they lived in, officers explained that the works would be added to a “mop-up” programme to be conducted in the last year of the Decent Homes Programme or when the property became vacant. The Committee asked for more information on this (Action No. 174.1). The Committee noted, in response to a question, that there was a compliance team who inspected Decent Homes work once completed.</p> <p>The Committee observed that the inspection concluded that improvements were required in customer services and understanding customer needs. The Business Improvement Manager explained that this was based largely on Mystery Shopping results and Homes for Haringey’s 2007 STATUS survey results. Mystery shopping results had improved steadily over time. The 2007 STATUS survey was done during year 1 of the Decent Homes Programme. Homes for Haringey will undertake a further tenant survey this year to check progress. The Audit Commission also commented that not all staff had had recent customer care training. The Business Improvement Manager explained that this referred to a group of Customer Service Centre staff whose training was not controlled by Homes for Haringey –inspectors took the view that HfH should be able to insist on this through the service level agreement. Whilst HfH had over 90% of demographic information against most strands (information was collected by surveys and by going out and talking to people (door knocking)) the inspection concluded that understanding customer needs was low. HfH is continuing to increase collection and has plans in place to do so. HfH staff also respond to customer needs in less formal ways – examples given were that estate-based staff will call on a resident if they have not seen them for a couple of days or after a hospital stay, staff knowledge of residents is fed into plans for Estate Action Days.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that the role of an income collection officer</p>

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	<p>included working with tenants who were not keeping up with rent payments. More information about Homes for Haringey's approach to income collection was requested, including figures for outstanding rental payments, and what specific actions would be taken to improve the collection rate. (Action No. 174.2).</p> <p>RESOLVED to note the report.</p>
<p>OSCO175.</p>	<p>CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>The Committee received the briefing on the Cabinet Member for Finance and Sustainability portfolio and responses to the advance questions submitted. Committee members asked supplementary questions, the responses of which are recorded below.</p> <p>Re. Q1 & Q2 – Corporate Property and Disposals – The Cabinet Member reported that property disposals were considered on a case by case basis including issues such as value, running costs, carbon emissions and regeneration.</p> <p>Re. Q3 – Public Liability Claims – It was reported that the number of public liability claims had fallen largely due to work with service departments to target high risk areas. The Council was part of an insurance consortium which shared best practice among the local authorities.</p> <p>The Committee enquired about whether the number of claims due to damaged paving and potholes, caused by the recent bad weather, had increased. Officers reported that this was possible, however, there had been a gradual reduction in such claims over a period of 4 or 5 years and highways maintenance projects targeted areas which involved large numbers of claims.</p> <p>Re. Q4 – Audit and Risk Management – The Cabinet Member stated that he was confident about the level of shared services being considered, particularly with Waltham Forest which was socially and politically similar to Haringey, and that some services were already being shared. He recognised that there were risks and outcomes other than efficiency to consider such as delivering better services and economic development.</p> <p>Re. Q5 – Benefits and Local Taxation – The Director of Corporate Resources reported that the Housing Department held discussions with central London Boroughs about a “handover” of clients receiving housing benefits. The Committee noted that the Council was looking at practical ways of improving processes including: investigating the possibility of using the Direct Payments scheme for housing benefits and being involved with an implementation group set up by the Department for Work and Pensions to consider making benefit payments fair.</p> <p>Re. Q6 – Corporate Property Services - Committee Members noted that some NHS services would be moving into the 4th Floor of River Park House and discussions were being held with other health partners about future sharing of office space. The Committee asked for a briefing note giving more detail about</p>

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	<p>what NHS services would be moving into River Park House. (Action No. 175.1)</p> <p>The Committee requested a 1-page briefing note on the history of the Hornsey Depot for which a development partner was being chosen. (Action No. 175.2)</p> <p>The Committee observed that the briefing on Page 23 of the agenda pack stated 93% of customer service calls were answered within 30 seconds but CS2 on Page 13 of the Period 9 Performance Monitoring report gave a 69% value for 2010/11. The Cabinet Member explained that the 93% figure in the briefing was for November 2010 and the 69% was a year to date figure which took into account a very low performance in April 2010 of just 15% of calls being answered within 30 seconds.</p> <p>The Committee expressed regret at the planned closure of the North Tottenham Customer Care Centre. The Cabinet Member agreed with some of the comments made by the Committee including that local community hubs could not substitute for the closure of customer service centres. The Committee noted that better systems for managing queues were being considered and new online transaction systems should reduce the number of people using the centres. The Committee requested a list of London boroughs that operated with only one customer service centre and whether they also provided one-stop shops. (Action No. 175.3).</p> <p>RESOLVED to note the briefing.</p>
<p>OSCO176.</p>	<p>PERIOD 8 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE - EXCEPTIONS REPORT & PERIOD 8 COUNCIL BUDGET MONITORING - EXCEPTIONS REPORT</p> <p>The Committee received the report on Period 8 of the Council's Performance Exceptions and Budget Monitoring Exceptions and the Period 9 Performance Exceptions and Budget Monitoring Exceptions report, circulated as a second dispatch. The following was noted in response to questions posted by the Committee:</p> <p><i>(Clerk's note: 19:50 hrs – Cllr Bull left the meeting and the Vice Chair, Cllr Browne took over chairing the meeting)</i></p> <p>The Committee noted that it would be expensive for the Council to exit the lease of the Techonopark and that renting out the free space would be more effective but the local area had been particularly affected by the recession and so this was proving difficult.</p> <p>The Committee asked for a briefing note on the low occupancy of the Technopark (paragraph 15.5 – Period 9) including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How many units there were? 2. How many units were let (what %) and to what sort of businesses, how many people were employed in them and what income they yielded? 3. How many units (%) were used by council services? 4. How many units (%) were occupied by the community and voluntary sector and were these provided for free or at a reduced rent (detail to be provided)? (Action No. 176.1)

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Clerk's note: 19:55 hrs - Clerk's note: 19:50 hrs – Cllr Bull returned to the meeting and took over as chair.

Paragraph 15.5 and 15.6 (Period 8) - NI 73 and NI 74 – The Committee expressed concern about the low target for achievement of 5 or more A*-C grades in core subjects at GCSE and requested more information on achievements in relation to the new standard (Action No. 176.2).

The Committee noted the responses to the advance questions submitted in relation to Children's Services and the following was noted in response to discussions.

Paragraph 15.18 (Period 8) – Looked After Children (LAC) –The Committee stated its concern about the large overspend in this area and the unsettling nature of moving looked after children from one placement to another. Officers were reviewing how and why placement moves for these children had come about and any special action taken – a briefing would be provided to the Committee when this piece of work was complete (Action No. 176.3).

In response to questions about whether the Council had entered into discussions with magistrates about how the legal side of children's placements could be improved, officers reported that the Director of Children's Services had recently met with the Head of the Court Service about the legal process and costs. The Committee requested feedback from this meeting (Action No. 176.4).

In response to the Committee's concerns about the closure of Children Centres, the Deputy Director – Children and Families, stated that she did not expect there to be a direct link to the number of referrals as a result of the closure of Children's Centres as partners were aware of the Council's thresholds. The Committee asked for a future report back to the Committee if there was a drop in the number of referrals and more details about the areas of referrals (Action 176.5).

The Committee sought reassurance that targets were appropriate and vulnerable children were identified and assessed in a timely way. It was noted that work was allocated immediately to a social worker to undertake an assessment but if, in the meantime an urgent investigation was received then there would be a reprioritisation of work. An update on the issues raised above (Actions 176.2 – 176.5) would be provided at the OSC Child Protection meeting on 30th March 2011 (Action 176.6).

NI 135 - % of Carers received needs assessment or review and a specific care's service, or advice and information – the Committee requested a briefing note on how this target will be improved (Page 12 of Period 9 document) (Action 176.7).

Paragraph 14.8 (Period 9) – The Committee requested a breakdown of stage 1 complaints received (Action 176.8).

Paragraph 14.10 (Period 9) – The Committee asked for the monetary figure of the shortfall in collected council tax (Action 176.9).

Paragraph 14.11 (Period 9) – The Committee asked what impact on demand for

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	<p>services new benefit claims were having (Action 176.10).</p> <p>The Committee requested a briefing note on the demographic pressures on children’s services to justify the closure of some adult services. (Action 176.11).</p> <p>Paragraph 15.4 (Period 9) – The Committee questioned the delay in implementing revised fees and charges for parking and was informed that this was due to the decision being called-in (which required the decision to be reconsidered) and equalities impact assessment work required.</p> <p>IC 01 - % of rent collected – The Committee noted that Performance Officers had queried how this target could be 100.5% and further information would be circulated once received (Action 176.12).</p> <p>The Committee enquired, in response to Page 16 of the report on Period 9, whether sickness absence levels had reduced since the Council started preparing to make redundancies. In response it was reported that whilst the stress of redundancies was a potential cause for increased sickness absence the Council’s sickness levels had decreased.</p> <p>RESOLVED to note the report.</p>
<p>OSCO177.</p>	<p>HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION</p> <p>The Committee received the report on Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing and the proposed discretionary additional scheme for Harringey Ward and parts of St Ann’s and Noel Park Wards (pages 57-63 of the agenda pack). It was noted that the licence would only be relevant to 3 storey buildings.</p> <p>In response to the Committee’s comments and concerns, Steve Russell (Housing Improvement Team Manager) explained the difficulty in controlling the number of HMOs. It was estimated that there could be between 5,000 and 10,000 HMOs and that many properties had been converted without the relevant planning permission and could not be converted back to the property’s previous state due to 4 years elapsing since the conversions. With newer conversions the Council’s enforcement team could only take action once a property was being inhabited as an HMO and landlords would be held to account and forced to obtain a licence and meet standards. The Committee noted that landlords were going to great lengths to legitimise their work through “certificates of lawfulness”.</p> <p>The Committee questioned whether local lettings agencies were assisting the Council in identifying unlicensed HMOs and encouraging landlords to have licences before letting out a HMO. It was noted that the Council officers had visited all 30 agencies in Green Lanes and provided a booklet about services for all Houses in Multiple Occupation.</p> <p>RESOLVED to note the report.</p>
<p>OSCO178.</p>	<p>SOCIAL CARE TRANSPORT</p> <p>The Committee received and noted the progress update on the</p>

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	<p>recommendations made in the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Service Based Transport in Adult Social Care.</p> <p>The Committee questioned whether the planned closures of day centre provision would impact the transport service in terms of staff redundancies. The Head of Provider Service (Older People/ Mental Health), Len Weir, stated that whilst it was very early, there were unlikely to be staff redundancies but drivers would have less time driving and more down time. There had recently been a reduction in use of the transport service which could be due to personalised budgets, where people were choosing alternative services.</p> <p>RESOLVED to note the report.</p>
OSCO179.	<p>MEMBER SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-SCRUTINY</p> <p>Councillor Winskill suggested that the reorganisation of Haringey's Overview & Scrutiny Committee (as part of new governance arrangements) be considered at a future meeting.</p>
OSCO180.	<p>NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>There were no new items.</p>
OSCO181.	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meetings held on 6th December, 8th December (Call-in) and 20th December 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.</p>
OSCO182.	<p>FUTURE MEETINGS</p> <p>The Committee noted the dates for future meetings as follow:</p> <p>Monday 14th March 2011 Monday 28th March 2011 Wednesday 30th March 2011 Monday 9th May 2011</p>
OSCO183.	<p>SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS REQUESTED</p> <p>The Committee noted the actions which had been completed since the last meeting.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 21:00hrs.</p>

COUNCILLOR GIDEON BULL
Chair

SIGNED AT MEETING.....DAY OF.....

CHAIR.....