

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 18:30 ON WEDNESDAY, 20 DECEMBER 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Adults and Health Services
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Sabina Khan	

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Sabina Khan

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Asma Begum	
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	
Councillor James King	
Cllr Iqbal Hossain	Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Raj Mistry	(Corporate Director of Communities)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Filuck Miah	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Joel West	(Democratic Services Team Leader (Committees))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Musthak Ahmed gave apologies with Councillor Bodrul Choudhury acting as chair. Councillor Shafi Ahmed attended as a substitute.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting.

3. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

3.1 Major Events Policy for Events in Victoria Park

Cllrs Asma Begum, Sabina Akhtar and James King presented the reasons for call-in on behalf of the Call-in members and proposed alternative course of action as set out in the report.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Why should the park not be used for commercial activity and help support the local economy? Call in members stated that Victoria Park is a gift to the East End of London and should be treated like that. While it is important to bring income for the council, but the number of events that could happen here, would not allow locals to enjoy the park for what it is, a park. The income generated from this scheme does not even cover the cost of the Mayor's office.
- Will the events have a big impact on local residents, as similar events happen in Finsbury Park? Call in members stated that the large number of events in the park will not allow locals to be able to use the park. Comparing usage during Covid-19 Pandemic shows what happens when local residents are unable to use the park for organised sport events, community groups and personal activity. This park is for working class residents to make use of in a very built-up borough.
- Many children use Victoria Park for exercise, parties, and other social activity, what impact will that have on local children? If an event happens on a Friday night, and if waste management is not strict, children may not have access on a Saturday morning. Call in members highlighted that children's groups within the community have not been consulted about this decision and neither have local members. It will have an affect on children who cannot access the park during the increased events. Many local housing estates use the park as a life line during the summer holidays.
- Can call in members discuss further the concerns about increased attendance numbers for events that fall under large, rather than major events? Call in members stated that over 5,000 attendees was classed as a major event, but now it has been raised to over 20,000. This means large events of people will no longer have the infrastructure of that comes with it. This feels very ill thought out and the decision does not take this into account.
- What work is needed to be done to ensure the balance between income generation and access to the park before the decision was taken? The call-in members highlighted how this decision does not consider what the large events will have on the waste management and other costs.

- Residents will be able to attend these events and benefit from them across the year. What engagement have you had with them over this decision? Call-in members stated that over the last few years they have been events which has had a detrimental impact on the local community. The amount of people leaving the park after large events can be very disruptive. The decision does not include community events which everyone can take part in.

Cllr Iqbal Hossain, Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation and Raj Mistry, Corporate Director of Communities, set out the context of the Cabinet Decision and reviewed the key elements of the decision.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- What consideration has been considered for vulnerable groups over the impact of this decision? Can the enhanced multi-agency approach be detailed further? Officers stated that as these are time limited contracts, so no group will be disproportionately targeted. When applications come in, they are assessed on what their potential impact will be, and there is a multi-agency approach on assessing these impacts. Agencies like traffic, police and other services are brought together for assessment, it will be a continuous process.
- Please confirm which days the proposed events will take place, how many days either side of the events will be needed and how many days the park will be closed to residents? Officers confirmed there will be 12 days the park will be in use for events, but until the events are confirmed it is unknown which days these are. In the past, not all these days have been used but the income has been generated from all these days. Around 30 per cent of the park is closed during these events. Major events can take many days to set up and clear down.
- Why did the Mayor and Chief Executive not consult with residents over this decision? Did the Lead Member engage with stakeholders like Sport England, Heritage England, or local park groups? If the Mayor is a listening mayor, then why did he not consult with anyone? Cllr Iqbal Hossain stated that there was no requirement to consult with any group. Previously event organisers had their applications scrutinised by different agencies.
- Would the Lead Member agree with this decision if it was in a park within his ward?
- Will the extra income generated by the events in the park cover the cost of the Mayor's Office?
- What conversations has the lead member had to ensure he is happy with the safety and the impact this will have on residents? Cllr Iqbal Hossain stated he is confident that this decision was taken with the interest of the borough.
- Will any income from these events be used to improve the park? Cllr Iqbal Hossain stated event organisers have to ensure they use the space, keep it safe and be sustainable.

After hearing from the Call-in Members, Lead Member and officers, the Committee considered the reasons for the Call-in and discussed if the committee should take further action.

Members of the committee wished that the lead member in attendance had answered all the questions put before him.

DECISION

The Committee RESOLVED that no further action would be taken on the call in.

The meeting ended at 19:35

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury
Overview & Scrutiny Committee