

# Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Monday, 29 January 2024 at 6.30 p.m.  
Council Chamber - Town Hall, Whitechapel**

## Supplemental Agenda

**3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES (PAGES 3 - 12)**

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 and 20 December 2024.

**5. Cost of Living (PAGES 13 - 30)**

Consider impact of cost of living in the borough and provision in place to support residents. The spotlight will consider different elements highlighted by members and residents, focus on the uptake of support packages, and invite residents to share their experiences.

**7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS (PAGES 31 - 32)**

To hear updates from the Overview and Scrutiny Leads on their work across the Council.

**Contact for further enquiries:**

Thomas French, Democratic Services,  
Thomas.French@towerhamlets.gov.uk  
020 7364 3048

Town Hall, 160 Whitechapel Road, London, E1 1BJ  
<http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee>





The best of London in one borough

**Tower Hamlets Council**  
Town Hall  
Mulberry Place  
5 Clove Crescent  
E14 2BG

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2023**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL**

**Members Present in Person:**

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
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	

**Other Councillors Present in Person:**

Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
Councillor Abu Chowdhury	(Cabinet Member for Safer Communities)

**Co-optees Present in Person:**

Jahid Ahmed  
Halima Islam

**Officers Present in Person:**

Denise Radley	(Corporate Director Health Adult Social Care & Deputy Chief Executive)
Doug Plumer	(Business Intel & Performance Lead)
Simon Baxter	(Director of Public Realm)
John Harrison	(Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit)
Ahsan Khan	(Head of Strategic Finance (Chief Accountant))
Simon Smith	(Head of Community Safety)
Angela Burns	(Public Health Programme Manager)
Filuck Miah	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Farzana Chowdhury	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillor Musthak Ahmed gave apologies, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury chaired the meeting in the absence.

The Mayor and Chief Executive also gave their apologies for the meeting.

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

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

## **3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

Minutes of the previous committee meeting will be presented at a future committee meeting.

## **4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **4.1 Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting Q2 2023-24**

Cllr Saied Ahmed presented the report on the council's strategic performance & delivery in Q2 2023-24 with Denise Radley, Simon Baxter and Doug Plumber.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Can we have an update on the recycling rate since the Mayor has declared a Waste Emergency? We have not seen an improvement since the emergency was declared. Under Covid-19, the recycling rate was not this low and the council managed to get through the pandemic. Officers have confirmed that the industrial action taken has affected the recycling rate and waste in general. The waste emergency will see an impact on over 13 different services. The council has taken steps to recover from this, along with presenting a plan to the GLA, which will be presented in 2024.
- The low percentage of recycling rate, quarter on quarter is very concerning. This was well before the industrial action. Officers confirmed that the recycling rate is low and there is no quick fix for that. There are big concerns on recycling rates in the high-rise buildings particularly.
- Members stated that officers were unable to explain what action has been taken under the Waste Emergency so far. The Mayor and the cabinet should be present to explain this plan.
- Missed collections of waste needs to be addressed and reported correctly within the data.
- Why was the measure on street cleansing not been submitted as a performance indicator? Officers confirmed that they will follow up in the street cleansing indicators.
- The council is spending a lot of time on estate cleaning, which is being impacted by poor collection rates.
- Can officers detail what are is the state of play around refuse collection vehicles? Officers detailed the on the road vehicles and ones in reserves. Officers will follow up in writing.

- Why did the council revise attendance performance indicators? Officers confirmed a written answer will be provided.
- Can officers explain the performance about care admissions? Officers detailed the care admissions for care homes and residential, which has been corrected in the reporting and will be shown in future reporting.

## **RESOLVED**

The committee noted the report.

### **4.2 Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Quarter 2**

Cllr Saied Ahmed presented the report on the council's budget monitoring for 2023/24 Quarter 2, with Ahsan Khan.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- What are the council plans for reducing agency staff? Cllr Saied Ahmed agreed that the spending on agency staff was high, and it is being reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- What are the impacts on closing business to the council on business rates and council tax? Officers will provide a written response on this.
- There are pressures on the council budget on rehoming and supporting residents who find themselves homeless, how much is spent on housing residents in expensive hotel based temporary accommodation? Officers will respond in writing on this issue.
- Staff within housing services have raised concerns with how the service has run, leading to costly overspends.
- What actions have been taken to ensure the council remains in a good financial position, with the external local and national pressures? Officers highlighted the internal boards that the council has to review spending. The boards have helped see where spending is growing, and intervention can be applied.

## **RESOLVED**

The committee noted the report.

### **5. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

#### **5.1 Update on draft Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment**

Cllr Abu Chowdhury gave a presentation on the draft Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment with Simon Smity and Angela Burns.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- How do we engage with those who did not take up training? What communications can the council take up to reach those who do not think the training is for them? Officers highlighted the work that has been done engaging with schools and local businesses, but also how important the work around prevention is.
- What are the Mayor's own targets for VAWG, as it feels like the council is scaling back in this area? Officers stated that this is the biggest year for VAWG funding and shows the council is taking violence in the community very seriously.
- When the council runs campaigns, like the 16 days of activism campaign for VAWG, it is important to ensure that information is captured and recorded appropriately.
- Some of the language needs to be reconsidered, like the wording around male allies and empowering men, where this needs to be women centred.
- Housing is an area that needs to be urgently reviewed as a safeguarding area for the work of VAWG. Officers detailed the emergency accommodation for vulnerable women across the borough, stating how the council is considered good in this area. The council is working towards gaining best practice accreditation in this area.
- The strategy needs to consider what advice is given out to residents to ensure it is compliant with the law but also empathic of those who are in a vulnerable situation.
- The strategy should seek to engage with all members to gain a picture of what is going on with residents across the borough.

## **RESOLVED**

The committee noted the presentation

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

The Committee agreed Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Unrestricted Cabinet Papers to be submitted to Cabinet.

## **7. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

### **RESOLVED:**

Members noted the forward plan.

## **8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG**

### **RESOLVED:**

Members noted the action log.

**9. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

**RESOLVED:**

Members noted the Update

**10. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items.

**11. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS**

Nil items.

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

**13. 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.

**14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

Nil items.

**15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 20:38

Chair,  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

This page is intentionally left blank



**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 Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
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	

**Members Preset 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 an 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

# LBTH: Responses to the Cost of Living Crisis

Scrutiny Committee 29/01/24



# The national context – Compounded crises

## Cost of living:

- Households in London with the second lowest incomes currently seeing a 27% increase in the cost of a weekly shop compared to March 2020
- Price cap currently at £1,928 per year, up from £1,179 in March 2020

## Impacts of Covid-19:

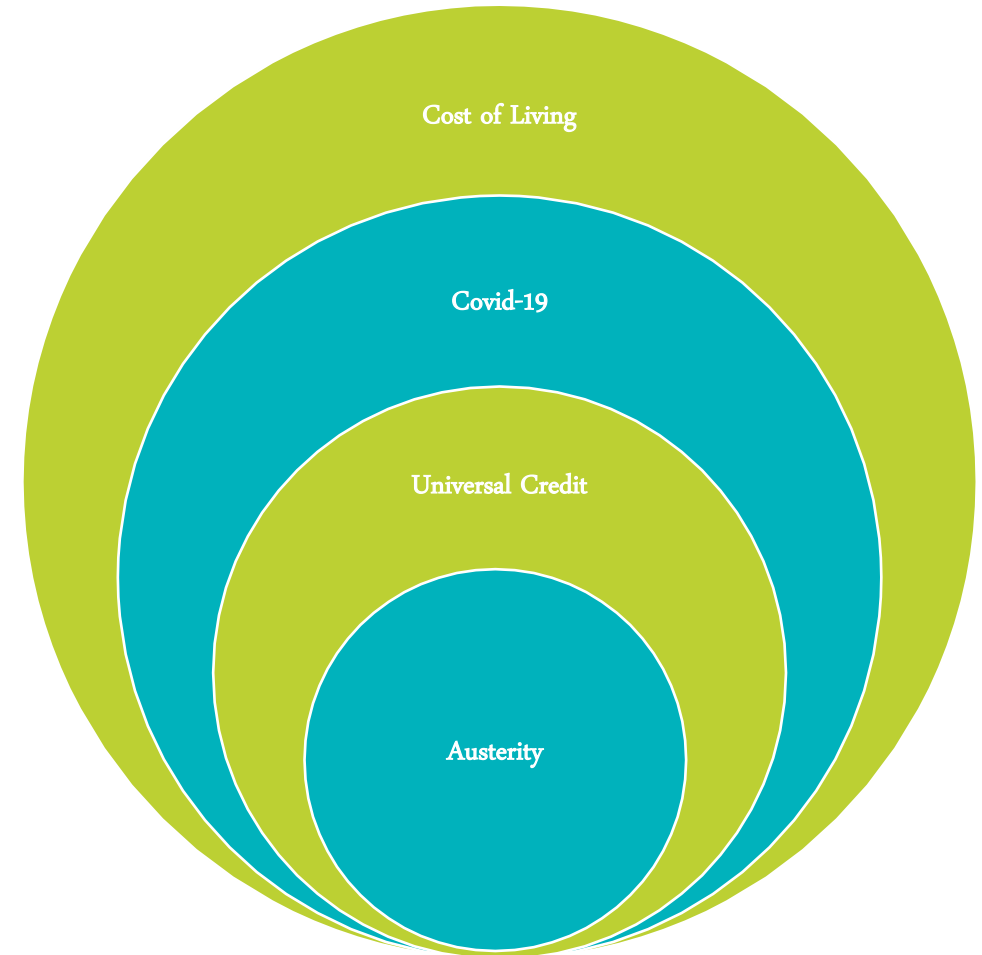
- Bangladeshi community most likely group to report loss of income during pandemic

## Universal Credit

- Administrative errors, 5 week wait & arrears, digital-by-default delivery, two child limit

## Austerity

- Benefits caps and freezes



# Cost of Living: Unique challenges

Challenges in tackling the Cost Of Living Crisis play out both nationally and locally

- Barriers to access – language, technology in particular among key cohorts
- Limited resources – financial, human and assets
- Limited actionable resident data and hesitancy in providing data from in-need cohorts
- Communicating support effectively can be complex – particularly to people who have not needed LA intervention before





# Our approach

- Prioritise ease of access to crisis support where possible
- Deliver cash first solutions as a preferred option
- Utilise Household Support Fund to maximise impact of central government resource
- Empower existing programmes to deliver more broadly
- Expand provision for groups experiencing longer term hardship
- Deliver simple, effective and accessible comms

Page 16





# LBTH Responses to the Cost of Living Crisis



## Cash first interventions

- 38,500 payments given out across 2023 - £4.3m of direct intervention
- Used council resources, knowledge and data to target key cohorts acutely impacted by CoL
- Utilised LIFT dashboard to identify those at highest risk of falling into serious debt and financial insecurity
- Able to impact large cohorts and extremely vulnerable people in smaller cohorts

Page 17



# LBTH Responses to the Cost of Living Crisis



## Cash first interventions

## Cohorts supported

- Pension Credit Claimants
- Healthy Start Eligible families
- Families with FSM eligible children
- Housing Benefit recipients
- Residents with High Energy Use Medical Equipment
- Young Carers
- In-work financially insecure residents
- Residents receiving higher level disability benefits
- Working age adults and pensioners in the worst income to expenditure bracket

Page 18





# LBTH Responses to the Cost of Living Crisis



## Cash first interventions

### RSS

- Resident Support Scheme established pre-CoL crisis
  - Served as by-application route for HSF support
  - Expanded criteria to include access to food and energy
- More than £2m awarded between April 22 and October 23

Page 19



# LBTH Responses to the Cost of Living Crisis



## Cost of Living Help

### Comms Campaign

- High profile comms campaign to drive engagement with advice, signposting and support
- Booklet and webpage identifying support for specific needs (e.g. energy, food, employment, health and wellbeing)
- Campaign pushed through council buildings and libraries, housing associations, bus stops, refuse vehicles, Our East End
- Weekly articles in council newsletter to highlight support available
- Tackling disinformation, confusion over national and local support provision, barriers to access for those newly in need of support

Page 20

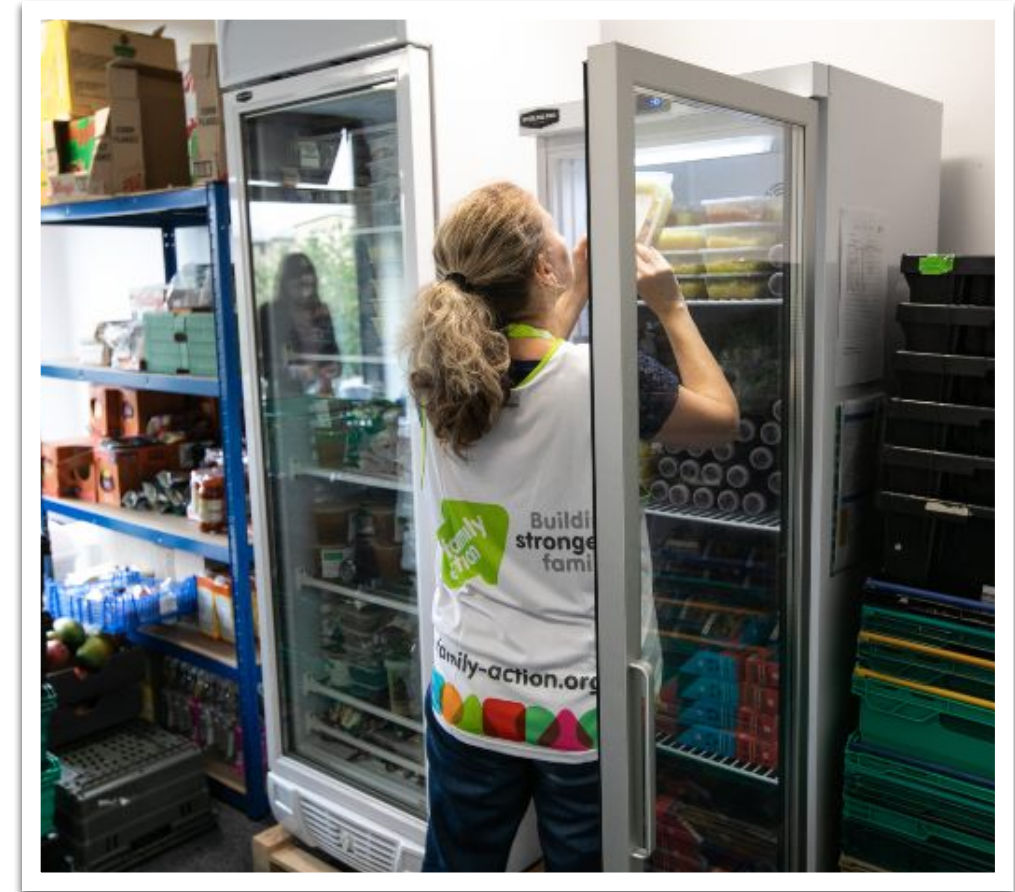


# LBTH Responses to the Cost of Living Crisis

## Ongoing workstreams

- Food Store Network – Food aid and signposting supporting 2,503 residents across 6 sites
- Resident Support Outreach Team – income maximisation generating £396,889 in backdated benefits from April to December 2023
- LBTH Food Hub supporting more than 60 VCS organisations embedded in communities
- Pension Credit campaign creating additional £492,521 annual income for 125 residents
- HAF programme – food and activities in the school holidays, programme reaching 32% of FSM eligible children (up on 26% nationally)

Page 21





# Future delivery:

## Challenges and Pressures

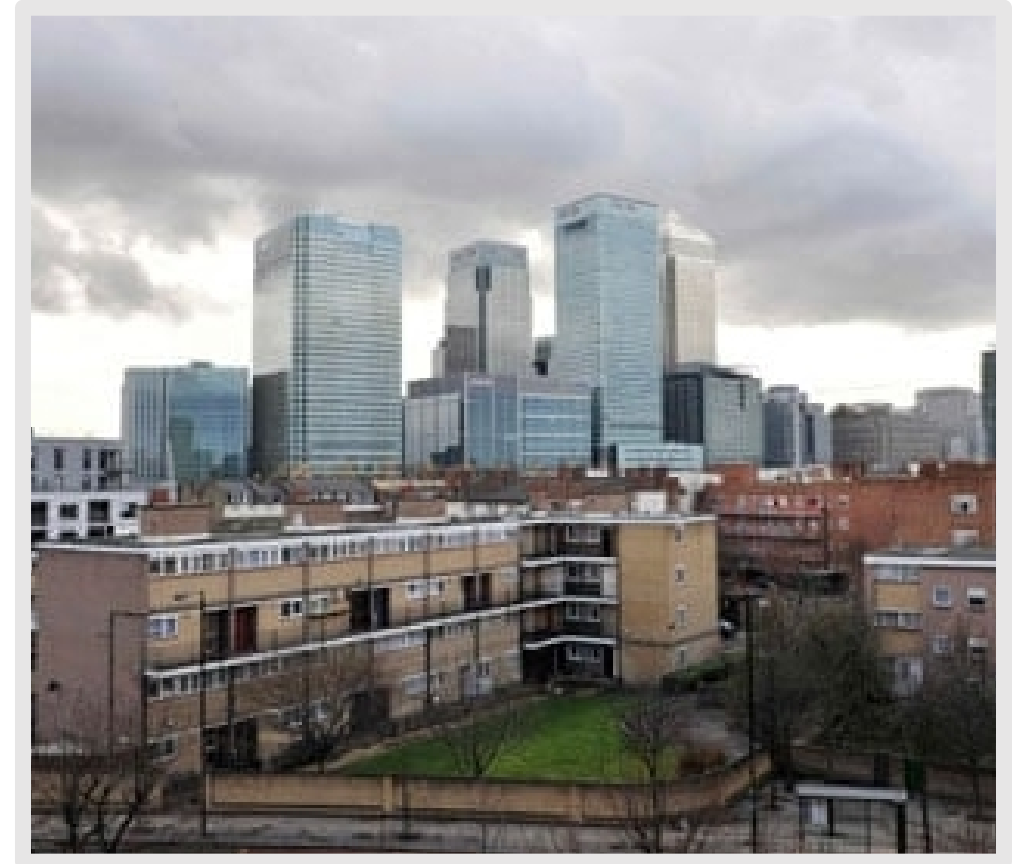


# Future delivery:

## Priorities

- Need to identify strategy for interventions going forwards
- Will government provide further funding?
- Particular need to set key cohorts and programmes for officers to prioritise
- Data led but dependent on embedded council knowledge
- Groups put at risk by CoL crisis:
  - Pensioners
  - FSM eligible children
  - Disabled residents
  - Residents in energy inefficient households
  - Residents with 5 + people in the property

Page 23



This page is intentionally left blank



# **Wapping Bangladesh Association**

**A Brief Presentation on the Cost-of-Living Crisis Faced by  
WBA's User Groups**

**Atikur Rahman**  
Centre Manager

## **Cost-of-Living Crisis faced by Our User Groups**

- ▶ In the past 12-months WBA's information and advice service has seen an increase of 40% overall in the number of local residents seeking help with the cost-of-living crisis**

## Cost-of-Living Issues Faced by WBA's User Groups

- ❑ Increased Shopping and Food bills
- ❑ High energy costs particularly with Heating and Lighting Costs
- ❑ Rise in Fuel Costs
- ❑ Vulnerable to loss of essential services e.g. disconnection of gas / electricity.
- ❑ Rising personal debt levels
- ❑ Loss of employment particularly in the Hospitality Sector.
- ❑ Huge drop in income reported by people who are self-employed e.g Uber Drivers (High Fuel Costs, Insurance etc)

## **Our Users Come to WBA Seeking the Following Help & Support**

- ❑ WBA Advisers to negotiate bill payment plans with utility companies.**
- ❑ Advice on additional benefits that they can apply.**
- ❑ Advice on financial planning.**
- ❑ Advice and information to get back into work.**
- ❑ Access to grants or any other financial help available.**
- ❑ Access / Referrals to Food Banks or Food Programme.**
- ❑ Joining WBA's Lunch Programme.**


## **Impact of the Costs-of-Living Crisis on our User Groups**

**Our user groups have been impacted emotionally, social & economically driving people into poverty, poor physical & mental health, isolation & loneliness.**

## **Cost-of-Living Support Provided by WBA**

- Freshly Cooked Hot Meals 3-Days a Week**
- Warm & Safe Daytime Meeting Space for Vulnerable Older People**
- Food Parcels and Food Vouchers**
- Employment Training Programme**
- Financial Planning and Budget Training**
- Benefits Advice Surgery**

# Agenda Item 7

<p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b></p> <p>29 November 2024</p>	 <p><b>TOWER HAMLETS</b></p>
	<p><b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted</p>
<p><b>Scrutiny Lead Update</b></p>	

Cllr Abdul Malik, Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety

- Planning with officers for a scrutiny challenge session in March on the support mechanisms provided to traders in Markets. Site visits to markets in our borough will take place in February and I encourage other members to attend and join in the evidence-gathering.

This page is intentionally left blank