

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Monday, 25 March 2024 at 5.30 p.m.
Council Chamber - Town Hall, Whitechapel**

Supplemental Agenda

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES (PAGES 3 - 14)

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 and 25 February 2024.

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LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
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 Maisha Begum	
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Sabina Khan	

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
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Co-optees Present in Person:

Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Julie Lorraine	(Corporate Director for Resources)
Abdulzarack Kassim	(Finance Director Deputy Section 151 Officer)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

John Harrison	(Director of Finance (Deputy S151))
Paul Patterson	(Corporate Director Housing Regeneration)
Robert Woollatt	(Head of Strategic & Corporate Finance)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Lead)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Abdul Mannan and Sabina Khan gave their apologies and joined the meeting online. Jahid Ahmed gave his apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting. Cllr Mannan declared that he was a board director at the Bromley by Bow Center.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The minutes of the committee will be presented at a future committee meeting.

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5. BUDGET REPORT 2024-25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024-27

Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, gave a presented the Budget Report 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-27, with Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources, Abdulzarack Kassim, Finance Director Deputy Section 151 Officer.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- What are the main risks to the council carrying out this proposed budget and what are the planned mitigation measures? Officers detailed the potential risks, including reliance on commercial activity and issues raised by housing within the borough. However, mitigation measures include targeting new services for commercial ventures and internal governance procedures to access budgetary issues as they occur.
- Members stated concern that the council seemed to deliberately delay announcing the greater raise in council tax to later in the budget setting process.
- The large increase of council tax was not apart of the bulk of the budget consultation with members, why did this proposal come so late? What changed so dramatically to lead to the raise in the council tax? Officers confirmed that a changing climate in government funding and not wanting to rely on further usage of council reserves, has led to a larger raise in council tax.
- Does the council consider that they fully understand the level of exception they have in place to ensure the council tax rise does not affect those who are most vulnerable within the borough? Officers stated that they believe they have put in place a scheme that supports residents in the borough, while raising income to fund services. However after a year, members of the council, officers and stakeholders will be able to see what a year of the scheme has done, and it can be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

- What does the council have in place to cover the over £2m shortage in funding for services? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that the council will be focusing on income generation rather than drawing from reserves to fund services.
- Can you provide a breakdown of savings in the Mayor's Office? What staff have been redeployed? Officers stated that savings are across different teams and will see a major reduction in the usage of consultants among other areas. A lot of the staff will be part of a single point of resident enquiry, within customer service. Many of the casework staff within the Mayor's office will now be within general roles within the customer service team.
- Members expressed concern at the delay at obtaining details of job descriptions and salaries of the Mayor's Office.
- What work is being done to ensure that the Granby Community Hub, and Somali Senior Citizens Club and Women's Group is being funded and supported appropriately? Cllr Saied Ahmed highlighted how more resources have gone into the hub and allow for more services to run for the Somali community. More funding would be welcome but the initial funding supports a growth in support for the hub.
- Can officers outline the sustainability of budgeting around the Women's Resource Centre? Officers confirmed the revenue budget costs of the Women's Centre to run over 3 years.

The committee made the following recommendations:

1. The council does not need to increase council tax by 3 per cent
2. Households which currently do not fall in the council tax support scheme, should be reviewed to see if they need further support
3. To consider a rental cap or not to increase council housing rent.
4. For the council to consider the impact private renter increases are having on residents.

The chair thanked committee members, officers and Cllr Saied Ahmed for the hard work in preparing the budget and efficient scrutiny across the council's budget setting process.

RESOLVED:

The committee noted the report.

6. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Update.

8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the officer updates on committee action.

9. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

10. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Nil items.

11. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

12. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

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

14. 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.

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

16. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

The Chair highlighted the Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Challenge Session on Markets on 6 March 2024.

The meeting ended at 20:12

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 18:34 ON MONDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
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 Asma Islam	
Councillor Sabina Akhtar	
Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury	

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Abu Chowdhury (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities)

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Ann Corbett	(Director of Community Safety)
Keith Stanger	(Head of Neighbourhood Operations)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Lead)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Bodrul Choudhury, Marc Francis and Sabina Khan. Councillor Sabina Ahkter was in attendance as a substitute. Halima Islam gave apologies as she was joining online.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting. Cllr Ahmodur Khan stated a family relationship with a London Metropolitan Police Officer.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 and 29 January 2024 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. BOROUGH COMMANDER SPOTLIGHT

Councillor Abu Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Ann Corbett, Director of Community Safety, Keith Stanger, Head of Neighbourhood Operations, introduced the item, highlighting the council's work on community safety, the council and the police, and the Violence Against Women and Girls campaign.

Local residents provided testimony on their lived experiences of community policing and women's experiences within the borough. They highlighted the importance of access to safe, well lit roads, self-defence classes, building up trust with women across different communities and how the police need to continue to listen to women when issues are brought up.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- What does accessible access to police mean to you? Residents highlighted how important it is to know where women can go to ensure they will be heard and be safe. The women's inclusive team has done a lot of work around this and supported many women where English is not a first language.
- What current issues can you report to the committee on safety on the streets and how can the council work with the police to ensure there is a more community facing approach? Residents reflected that there has been a decline in police patrolling the streets and a lot of areas are not well lit, with reporting about street lighting taking a lot of time to be fixed. Parks and larger outdoor areas feel unsafe due to a lack of lighting and CCTV.
- What do you think is the council's role in building trust in the community with policing? Residents stated that trust is a big issue, even when you put yourself in a position of going forward to report. However, a bigger issue even before a woman will come forward to report, is the lack of awareness of what domestic violence is. The council needs to help with raising awareness of this in different communities, along with the police.

Borough Commander Detective Chief Superintendent James Conway presented to the committee, highlighting A New Met for London, the two year plan on how the Met will deliver more trust, less crime, and high standards.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- A year on since the Borough Commander visited the committee, where do you think police are in dealing with issues residents have with the police? James Conway stated that building up trust is vital with ensuring that the residents feel confident coming forward to report crime. How residents are treated when they do come forward to report a crime, not just by the police but across the whole service. If a resident is coming forward to an issue like domestic violence, then they need to be believed and an environment is created where they feel supported throughout the reporting.
- What is the police doing to tackle rising violent crime within the borough? And what is the police doing to build trust within communities who are more vulnerable to violent crime? How will work against drug related crime be dealt with? James Conway highlighted the serious crime strategy the Metropolitan Police is developing, but more locally local police are working on tailoring police response to different boroughs, on the big issues in each ward. The police is dealing with drug related crime as a police force, but also as a stakeholder with the council, who also have a role in its own services.
- Car theft is an increasing concern across the borough, what is the police response to this? James Conway stated that localised teams are dealing with local issues, with Hackney Wick recently seeing more work to look into car related crimes.
- A lot of concerns in the borough is that residents do not see a fixed familiar ward team tackling crime in their area, will there be an increase in police presence that stays within the local area? It would do a lot of building trust in the community to see ward officers of a more diverse background, so residents can see themselves in the local police. James Conway reported on the dedicated ward officers and efforts recently to be recruiting more in this area and hopefully the next round of budget will support further recruitment. Generally, the Metropolitan Police are working to build more engagement teams, so officers can go into communities, with an experience of that community.
- For a lot of young people, the police inappropriately using stop and search powers is their first interaction with the police. What are the police doing to ensure officers are correctly trained in this area? James Conway reflected on stop and search, stating that while it is an effective method with dealing with reducing weapons and drug issues on the street, it is also seen as being used in negative ways, and more can be done to ensure it is being used in a more critical and targeted way.

The chair thanked the Borough Commander for his presentation and for residents attending and sharing their lived experiences with the committee.

5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the action log.

6. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Update.

8. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

10. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Nil items.

11. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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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 20:42

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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