

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 19:00 ON MONDAY, 9 JANUARY 2023

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children's and Education
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Sabina Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance (To Be Confirmed)
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety

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:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Nisar Visram	(Director of Finance Audit and Procurement)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Joel West	(Democratic Services Team Leader (Committees))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

Nil items.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 November 2022 approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the Proceedings.

4. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil Items.

5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 The Council's 2023-24 Budget Report and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-26

The committee considered The Council's 2023-24 Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-26, presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed and Nisar Visram, Director of Finance Audit and Procurement.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Is the council confident that the forecasting is robust, to allow for the council budget to be agreed? Cllr Saied Ahmed reported on the process around creating the budget to ensure it has been created in a robust form.
- The year-on-year savings that are required to ensure the council is balancing its budget, along with the usage of the council's reserves, how sustainable is this position? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that the budget will be put in place to help the residents of this borough as it is going through tough times, with economical help, but also through education, environmental and crime reduction measures as well. However, a budget like the one presented does require usage of the reserves. But this is not something the council can continue to do, so the council will be detailing how the future savings will be found as the financial year continues. The comments of the Chief Financial Officer have been considered and the usage of reserves is not something the council has taken lightly.
- What plans are the council looking at to increase growth to ensure services are able to grow post 2026? Has the council considered council tax increases? Cllr Saied Ahmed reported on the many revenue sources the council has and the importance of ensuring vital services are continued to be run by the council after 2026. While the council has looked at the modelling around council tax, and the administration decided not to increase council tax.
- What has the council considered to safeguard the council's reserves? Cllr Saied Ahmed highlighted what reserves the council will be accessing, some pools of reserves are safe guarded and the council's constitution does have restrictions on the levels of the reserves as well. Nisar Visram reported on the projections around the usage of the council's reserves.

- How will the cost of the secondary school meals be found?
- The staffing costs of the Mayor's Office, is this a justifiable cost when the budget is looking for council savings? Cllr Saied Ahmed explained the office has expanded to carry out casework and policy support for the new council executive.
- How does the council budget compare to other local authorities? Cllr Saied Ahmed highlighted that the council's budget is ambitious compared to other authorities, but also services have been brought in house and the council has a higher amount of reserves.
- Committee members made recommendations, including resident skill growth, to review the Mayor's Office Staffing and extending the EMA

RESOLVED:

The presentation be noted.

5.2 Fees and Charges 2023-24

The committee considered the presentation on the Fees and Charges 2023-24, presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed and Nisar Visram, Director of Finance Audit and Procurement.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Can the pricing for School meals, per pupil be confirmed? Will the cost of living crisis have an impact on meal sizes? Cllr Saied Ahmed confirmed that these were increases of around 7 – 8 per cent, which is due to the rise in interest. The council is committed to providing free school meals that are beneficial for the children.
- On market traders, there are a number of chargers and fees that need to be expanded on and explained further. If market traders are struggling to pay fees, will the council provide support to these businesses? Cllr Saied Ahmed agreed to investigate these points, but stated the council has not increased fees, it has only continued what the previous administration enacted.
- On visitor parking, will the council be monitoring this and will the cost be considered? Will the free parking time be long enough to be a benefit to residents? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that it will be a yearly cost to the council but it will be a positive return to the borough, through increased trade at the markets, higher footfall and increased access to the markets. The Council will monitor this and consider changing this measure if it does not prove to be beneficial or increased based on feedback.

RESOLVED:

The presentation be noted.

6. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Nil items

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

Nil items

8. 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

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

Nil Items.

The meeting ended at 20:15

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee