

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**RECORD OF THE DECISIONS OF THE CABINET****HELD AT 5.45 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2023****COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL****Members Present in Person:**

Mayor Lutfur Rahman	
Councillor Maium Talukdar	(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning (Statutory Deputy Mayor))
Councillor Kabir Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding)
Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion)
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	(Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care)
Councillor Abu Chowdhury	(Cabinet Member for Safer Communities)
Councillor Iqbal Hossain	(Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation)
Councillor Abdul Wahid	(Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Growth)

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Kabir Hussain	(Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency)
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Officers Present in Person:

John Ainsworth	(Senior Performance Improvement Analyst)
Susannah Beasley-Murray	(Divisional Director of Supporting Families)
Chris Boylett	(Interim Head of Revenue and Benefits)
Ann Corbett	(Director, Community Safety)
Janet Fasan	(Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Lisa Fraser	(Acting Corporate Director, Children's Services)
Stephen Halsey	(Chief Executive)
Chris Leslie	(Head of Strategic and Corporate Finance)
Julie Lorraine	(Corporate Director Resources)
Raj Mistry	Corporate Director for Communities
Paul Patterson	(Interim Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration)
Doug Plumer	(Data Analytics, Business Intelligence & Performance Lead)
Denise Radley	(Corporate Director, Health and Social Care)
Joel West	(Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

John Harrison

Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

There were none.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

DECISION:

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 29 November 2023 be approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record of proceedings.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE MAYOR

See the minutes.

5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions

See the minutes.

5.2 Any Unrestricted Decisions "Called in" by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

See the minutes.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Young Mayor Election 2023

This item was not considered as the results of the Young Mayor Election had been announced by the Mayor earlier in the meeting.

6.2 Strategic Delivery and Performance report (23-24) Quarter 2

DECISION

1. Note the strategic delivery and performance report for Q2 covering the period of 1st July 2023 to 30th September 2023 (This cover report).

2. Review the status of 51 performance measures in Q2 tracking the delivery of Year 2 of the Strategic Plan 2023-2024 (See Appendix A to the report).

Action by**CHIEF EXECUTIVE (S. HALSEY)**

Director Dir. of Strategy, Transformation & Improvement (R. Beattie)

Corporate Head of Strategy and Improvement (D. Plumer)

Reasons for the decision

The Council's reporting cycle – the *draft Performance Management & Accountability Framework 2023-24* is set up to provide quarterly update reports for the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 including operational performance measures.

Targeted performance measurement is relevant to strategic policy as it helps services to be designed so that they can deliver strategic objectives.

By examining performance measures of operational activity, the Council can make informed decisions about how to effectively steer resources towards the goals of the organisation.

Alternative options

The Cabinet may decide not to review the performance information. This is not recommended as Members have a key role to review and challenge under-performance and utilise performance information to inform resource allocation.

6.3 Budget Monitoring 23/24 Quarter 2**DECISION**

1. Note the council's position and consequent forecast outturn as at 30th September 2023, against General Fund Budget (based on the previous structures), Dedicated Schools Budget, Housing Revenue Account and earmarked reserves for 2023-24.
2. Note the actions taken to date to address the demand pressures as set out in Appendix A to the report, Section 3.2.
3. Note the progress made against the 2023-24 savings targets, based on forecasts as of 30th September 2023.
4. Note the council's forecast outturn position against General Fund and Housing Revenue Account capital programme approved budgets for 2023-24, based on forecasts as of 30th September 2023.
5. Note that there are no equalities implications directly resulting from this report, as set out in Section 4 of the report.

Action by**CORPORATE DIRECTOR RESOURCES (J. LORRAINE)**

Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit (J. Harrison)

Head of Strategic Finance (C. Leslie)

Reasons for the decision

The regular, timely and accurate reporting of Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring information through the year is a key financial control. It makes visible variations to budget to inform decision making and enable the council to take timely mitigating actions.

It is important that issues driving variations to budget are understood, challenged and addressed so that the council remains both within the approved budget envelope and on track to delivering the plans Members budgeted for.

Where there are underlying issues arising that cannot be contained by individual service management action, for example increasing costs of homelessness, which is an issue of national concern particularly so across London Boroughs, then alternative proposals can be developed. These then form realistic and acceptable solutions which address the financial impact; CMT and Members have a key role in approving such actions. Only as a measure of last resort should proposals represent potential changes to the budget originally approved.

Alternative options

The council could choose to monitor its budgetary performance against an alternative time frame, but it is considered that the reporting schedule provides the appropriate balance to allow strategic oversight of the budget by Members and to manage the council's exposure to financial risk. More frequent monitoring is undertaken by officers and considered by individual service directors and the council's CMT including approval of management action.

6.4 Council Tax Discounts and Premiums for Empty Properties and Second Homes**DECISION:**

1. Reduce the current 100% discount awarded to unoccupied and unfurnished and uninhabitable dwellings is reduced to zero (0%) for the financial year 2024/25 onwards.
2. From 1st April 2024, amend the application of the levy of 100% premium for long-term empty properties to 1 year reducing this from the current 2 years.
3. From 1st April 2024 levy an additional premium on long-term empty property vacant for over 5 years at the maximum permitted level of 200%. The resulting charge will be 300% of the standard council tax.

4. From 1st April 2024 levy an additional premium on long-term empty property vacant for over 10 years at the maximum permitted level of 300%. The resulting charge will be 400% of the standard council tax.
5. Council be given the discretion, delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to reduce or waive the long-term empty premium charge in exceptional circumstances.
6. Give 12 months' notice that the Council will introduce a second home premium of 100% from 1st April 2025.

Action by**CORPORATE DIRECTOR RESOURCES (J. LORRAINE)**

Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit (J. Harrison)

Head of Strategic Finance (C. Leslie)

Reasons for the decision

The removal of the empty property discount will enable the Council to ensure that property owners are incentivised to return properties to occupation as soon as possible. With the ongoing shortage of housing across the borough it is important that the availability of housing is maximised. At the same time this will reduce the administrative burden of awarding relatively small discounts.

Increasing the premiums on long term empty properties will again seek to incentivise owners to return these properties to the market. Although this will not impact many properties it does reinforce the Council's messaging about tackling empty homes.

Introducing the second home premium is also aimed at encouraging owners to potentially return properties to long term and permanent use increasing the availability of homes.

Alternative options

The alternative considered was to keep the empty home premium at its current level and not to introduce the second home premium but given the priority to increase the availability of affordable housing in the borough this would not help to utilise this measure to encourage owners to bring properties back into occupation.

In relation to the removal of the empty and unfurnished discount again the alternative considered was to retain the 1-month discount, but this is administratively burdensome and would result in a continued loss of income to the council.

6.5 Record of Corporate Directors Actions 2023/24 Q2**DECISION:**

1. Note the Record of Corporate Directors' Actions set out in Appendix 1.

Action by**CORPORATE DIRECTOR RESOURCES (J. LORRAINE)**

Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit (J. Harrison)

Head of Strategic Finance (C. Leslie)

Reasons for the decision

The Council's constitution requires that Corporate Director's Actions in respect of contracts over £100,000 must be reported to Cabinet for noting.

The regular reporting of Corporate Director's Actions should assist in ensuring that Members are able to scrutinise officer decisions.

Alternative options

The Council is bound by its constitution to report to Cabinet financial decisions taken under Corporate Director's Actions. If the Council were to deviate from those requirements, there would need to be a good reason for doing so. It is not considered that there is any such reason, having regard to the need to ensure that Members are kept informed about decisions made under the delegated authority threshold and to ensure that these decisions are in accordance with Financial Regulations.

7. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

None.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

A motion to exclude the press and public was not required.

9. EXEMPT / CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

None.

10. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**10.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions in Relation to Exempt / Confidential Business**

None.

10.2 Any Exempt / Confidential Decisions "Called in" by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

None.

11. EXEMPT / CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

None.

12. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

None.