

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS****MINUTES 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****RESOLVED:**

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

**4. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR**

The Mayor received an Investors in People (IIP) Silver Award on behalf of the Council. Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive was pleased to announce that the Award included more elements of Gold than had previously been awarded to the Council.

The Mayor welcomed the newly elected Young Mayor, sixteen-year-old Fetuma Hassan from Mulberry Girls School. Fetuma briefly addressed the meeting and explained she looked forward to working with the Mayor and Cabinet during her time in the role.

**5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****5.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions**

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury, Vice Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee addressed the meeting on behalf of the Committee. He provided the Mayor and Cabinet with an overview of the Committee's recent meeting.

At meeting held earlier in the week, the OSC had considered

- The strategic performance delivery report 2023/24 Q2, noting the ongoing challenges with waste and what has been done as a result of the waste emergency declaration; the poor performance on recycling rates (and had requested performance information on the street cleansing measure) and homelessness support. It had noted the council performed strongly on a number of measures but that there are a number of areas where the council needs to continue with improvements.
- The budget monitoring report for 2023/24 Q2, including:

- discussing the factors contributing to forecast overspend and the strategies that are in place to address these specific challenges;
- dedicated Schools budget, and the steps being taken to address the volatility and potential impact on the forecasted breakeven position, especially with the number of referrals for assessment and associated cost with SEND.
- The draft Violence against women and girls (VAWG) needs assessment. Including:
  - how scrutiny recommendations from 2022 has been considered in this assessment;
  - barriers to support;
  - approach to victim of violence and giving up tenancy and then forced to becoming intentionally homeless;
  - making recommendations around strengthening housing policies and procedures to ensure it is culturally sensitive and supports victims of domestic violence; and more targeted awareness amongst young people through social media and engaging elderly women at doctor surgeries.

Finally, Councillor Choudhury asked the Mayor and Cabinet to note the Committee agreed pre-decision questions. The questions, and responses had been tabled.

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

The Mayor noted that the Monitoring Officer had received two call-in requests in relation to decisions made at the 29 November Cabinet meeting on which she had yet to deliberate:

- 6.7 Review of the Major Events Policy, Victoria Park
- 7.1 Changes and amendments to the Permit Transfer Scheme criteria.

## **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 (see the minute for Item 4).

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

The pre decision scrutiny questions and tabled responses were noted.

Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, introduced the report that provided the Mayor in Cabinet with a Quarter 2 monitoring update of Year 2 Annual Delivery Plan 2023-24 performance measures. Councillor Ahmed outlines some of the key achievements from the

past quarter, as well as some areas where the Council continued to experience challenge in meeting in targets.

The Mayor welcomed the report and noted the successful performance measures. With respect to the 5 red, 7 amber, he invited lead members, supported by relevant corporate directors, to provide explanation for the underperformance and to outline the measures in-place, or planned to reverse the underperformance. With respect to the 6 no data measures, the Mayor asked officers to provide an explanation why this was the case for each measure.

The Mayor offered his thanks to Cabinet members and officers for their contributions and reminded all present that the performance measures represented the tangible experiences of the borough's residents. He reiterated his ambition that all performance measures should be met.

**RESOLVED** that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Note the strategic delivery and performance report for Q2 covering the period of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (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).

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

The pre decision scrutiny questions and tabled responses were noted.

Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, introduced the report that introduced the report that presented the forecast year end outturn compared to the budget as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (Period 6/Quarter 2) for the General Fund, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Housing Revenue Account (HRA), progress against savings targets, the council's capital programme and provides projections on General Fund earmarked reserves. Councillor Ahmed explained that a challenging local government environment was making it particularly challenging in areas such as homelessness support and adult social care. He outlined the main areas of variance and briefly explained the reasons for each.

Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director Resources added further context. She asked the Mayor and Cabinet to note that the forecast reflected the position if the Council took no action to address it. However, there was a lot of work behind the scenes to act quickly and with agility to address overspends and manage pressures.

At the invitation of the Mayor, Cabinet members and relevant corporate directors introduced the key variances that fell within their portfolio areas and explained the drivers for each. It was noted that the Council had limited ability to contain overspends that related to core statutory duties.

The Mayor offered his thanks to Cabinet members and officers for their contributions. With regards to the capital forecast, he stressed it was of paramount importance that any potential slippages or additional costs were contained.

**RESOLVED** that the Mayor in Cabinet:

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

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

Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living introduced the report that proposed that the Council amend the current Council Tax discounts and exemptions applied to empty properties from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to encourage owners to bring properties back into use and increase the availability of homes in the borough. Councillor Ahmed explained there was also a proposal to introduce, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, an additional Council Tax premium on second homes in the borough.

Chris Boylett, (Interim Head of Revenue and Benefits) provided further details of the proposals.

The Mayor welcomed the proposals which he indicated would help both to address housing shortages in the borough and therefore ease overcrowding, and help raise additional income.

**RESOLVED** that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Reduces 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, amends 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 levies 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 levies 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. Gives 12 months' notice that the Council will introduce a second home premium of 100% from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.

#### **6.5 Record of Corporate Directors Actions 2023/24 Q2**

Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living

introduced the report that set out, for noting by Cabinet, the Corporate Director's Actions in respect of contracts over £100,000.

**RESOLVED** that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Notes the Record of Corporate Directors' Actions set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

#### **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.

The meeting ended at 6.50 p.m.

Chair, Mayor Lutfur Rahman  
Cabinet