

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.08 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Amy Lee

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

Councillor Musthak Ahmed and Councillor Amin Rahman declared a non-pecuniary – other registerable interest in item 8 and declared they were Board Members of Tower Hamlets Community Housing.

The Speaker, Councillor Jahed Choudhury and Councillors Abdul Mannan, Maisha Begum, Ayas Miah, Bodrul Choudhury and Ohid Ahmed declared a pecuniary interest in item 8, as either tenants and/or leaseholders of property owned by Tower Hamlets Community Housing or Poplar HARCA.

The Monitoring Officer granted a dispensation, to the above-named members due to the impact on the political balance at the meeting, owing to the large number of declarations made.

Councillor Ohid Ahmed left the chamber and did not participate in the debate.

3. MINUTES

DECISION

1. Agreed that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary Council meeting of 19th July 2023 be approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Speaker was authorised to sign them accordingly.

4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Announcements from the Speaker and the Chief Executive.

See the minutes.

5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**DECISION**

The Petition relating to the Compulsory Purchase of the Westferry Printworks for a school, was withdrawn by the Petitioner prior to the start of the Council meeting.

6. MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Lutfur Rahman presented his report to the Council.

The Opposition Group Leader, Councillor Sirajul Islam then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

Mayor Rahman provided concluding remarks.

7. ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE

The Administration motion on the Management of Council Assets was withdrawn by consent of members, through a vote.

8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE**TOWER HAMLETS COMMUNITY HOUSING**

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda relating to Tower Hamlets Community Housing, that had been moved by Councillor Marc Francis and seconded by Councillor Asma Islam.

Council also considered the amendment proposed by Councillor Kabir Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Abdul Mannan, as set out in the supplementary agenda.

ADDITIONS - BOLD**DELETIONS - ~~STRUCKTHROUGH~~****This Council notes:**

- THCH was founded by stock transfers from LBTH and for many years delivered high-quality housing management as well as the regeneration of estates and community development;
- THCH was recently downgraded to a G3 and V3-rating by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) for both governance and financial viability;

- The RSH has encouraged THCH to be taken over by another housing association and THCH has subsequently begun a consultation on a merger with Poplar HARCA;
- The RSH has a very poor track record in enforcing mergers between housing associations in Tower Hamlets and doesn't proactively take any account of residents' views.
- **That the Mayor has twice met with THCH residents to hear and discuss their concerns, and has instructed Officers to monitor the merger and any adverse impacts on them.**
- **That the Mayor and Officers are reviewing RSL performance more broadly and are preparing a new policy on strengthening governance.**
- **That in October the Social Housing Ombudsman is coming to the Town Hall for an event to be chaired by the Mayor to address all RSL residents concerns.**

This Council believes:

- THCH tenants and leaseholders deserve a much better service than they have been getting from their landlord for several years;
- LBTH has an ongoing obligation to residents living on those estates transferred to ensure the promises made by are delivered consistently;
- Enforced mergers of local stock transfer housing associations have sometimes resulted in residents receiving an even worse service from the social landlord they join;
- The views of tenants and leaseholders in the future of their housing association should be paramount in any decision by the Board of THCH and the RSH.

This Council resolves:

- To call on the Mayor to make representations to the RSH calling for the views of residents of THCH to be fully taken into account prior to a decision on any merger;
- ~~• To call on the Mayor to instruct council officers to urgently undertake a feasibility on the financial and practical implications of requesting a return of THCH stock to LBTH;~~
- ~~• To call on the Mayor to arrange a public meeting with residents of THCH to hear to listen directly to their experience of its services and thoughts what should happen.~~
- **To continue supporting those residents affected by the merger and to ensure good channels of communication are maintained for those residents' concerns;**

- **To support the Social Housing Ombudsman event taking place in October and encourage concerned THCH residents to attend.**
- **To support the Mayor in his efforts to strengthen RSL governance and resident engagement, and ensure that the services they provide improve.**

Following debate, the amendment moved by Councillor Kabir Ahmed was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

The motion as amended by Councillor Kabir Ahmed was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

DECISION

This Council notes:

- THCH was founded by stock transfers from LBTH and for many years delivered high-quality housing management as well as the regeneration of estates and community development;
- THCH was recently downgraded to a G3 and V3-rating by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) for both governance and financial viability;
- The RSH has encouraged THCH to be taken over by another housing association and THCH has subsequently begun a consultation on a merger with Poplar HARCA;
- The RSH has a very poor track record in enforcing mergers between housing associations in Tower Hamlets and doesn't proactively take any account of residents' views.
- That the Mayor has twice met with THCH residents to hear and discuss their concerns, and has instructed Officers to monitor the merger and any adverse impacts on them.
- That the Mayor and Officers are reviewing RSL performance more broadly and are preparing a new policy on strengthening governance.
- That in October the Social Housing Ombudsman is coming to the Town Hall for an event to be chaired by the Mayor to address all RSL residents concerns.

This Council believes:

- THCH tenants and leaseholders deserve a much better service than they have been getting from their landlord for several years;
- LBTH has an ongoing obligation to residents living on those estates transferred to ensure the promises made by are delivered consistently;

- Enforced mergers of local stock transfer housing associations have sometimes resulted in residents receiving an even worse service from the social landlord they join;
- The views of tenants and leaseholders in the future of their housing association should be paramount in any decision by the Board of THCH and the RSH.

This Council resolves:

- To call on the Mayor to make representations to the RSH calling for the views of residents of THCH to be fully taken into account prior to a decision on any merger;
- To continue supporting those residents affected by the merger and to ensure good channels of communication are maintained for those residents' concerns;
- To support the Social Housing Ombudsman event taking place in October and encourage concerned THCH residents to attend.
- To support the Mayor in his efforts to strengthen RSL governance and resident engagement, and ensure that the services they provide improve.

(Action by: Karen Swift, Director of Housing - Housing and Regeneration Directorate)

9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

9.1 Report of Cabinet: Statement of Licensing Policy 2023

Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency presented the Statement of Licensing Policy 2023 report. He explained Council was required to approve the Licensing Policy, which had been to Cabinet and would take effect from 1st November 2023.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Adopt the Statement of Licensing Policy to take effect from 1st November 2023.

(Action by: Raj Mistry, Interim Corporate Director, Communities Directorate)

10. OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 Annual Report of the Standards Advisory Committee

Mr John Pulford, Independent Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee presented the annual report. He outlined the achievements of the Committee before members added their comments.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Note the annual report of the Standards Advisory Committee for 2022-23.

(**Action by:** Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer)

10.2 Appointment of a Co-Opted Member to the Standards Advisory Committee

Mr John Pulford, Independent Chair of the Standard Advisory Committee stated the Committee had run a recruitment exercise to fill a vacancy for a co-opted member on the Committee. He requested Council to approve the appointment of the co-optee selected.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. The appointment of Faham Sinan-Katamba as a co-opted member of the Standards Advisory Committee for a four-year term, expiring 28th September 2027.

(**Action by:** Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer)

11. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

The following questions and in each case supplementary questions were put (except where indicated) and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member.

11.1 Question from Councillor Amin Rahman regarding the Council's accounts. A supplementary question was asked.

11.2 Question from Councillor Mufedah Bustin about the Council's asset portfolio. A supplementary question was asked.

11.3 Question from Councillor Musthak Ahmed about the independent investigation into housing management. No supplementary question was asked.

11.4 Question from Councillor Asma Islam regarding the housing building target. A supplementary question was asked.

11.5 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed regarding the LGA peer review. A supplementary question was asked.

11.6 Question from Councillor Rachel Blake about waste collection. A supplementary question was asked.

11.7 Question from Councillor Kamarul Hussain accessing the Workpath programme. No supplementary question was asked.

11.8 Question from Councillor Amy Lee about Leisure Services. As Councillor Lee was not present to ask the question, it was agreed that a written response would be provided to her question.

11.9 Question from Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled about the Council's housing management service. A supplementary question was asked.

11.10 Question from Councillor Ayas Miah regarding low emission vehicles registered in the borough.

11.11 Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury about free school meals. A supplementary question was asked.

11.12 Question from Councillor Sabina Akhtar about RAAC estates and schools. A supplementary question was asked.

11.13 Question from Cllr Ahmodul Kabir about the Mayors waste emergency. No supplementary question was asked.

Questions 11.14 to 11.27 were not put due to lack of time and written response would be provided.

(Action by: Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services to arrange written responses)

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Motion 12.2 was withdrawn by consent of Members through a vote. Motions 12.1 and 12.3 were not considered due to lack of time.

13. URGENT MOTION

EMERGENCY MOTION ON THE WASTE STRIKE

Council considered the urgent motion as printed in the supplementary agenda on the waste strike that had been moved by Councillor Kabir Hussain and seconded by Councillor Maium Talukdar.

Following debate, the motion moved by Councillor Kabir Hussain was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

DECISION

Council notes:

- The good relationship between the present administration and frontline workers, alongside the recognised trade unions of Tower Hamlets Council
- The historical work that Mayor Lutfur Rahman and organised workers in Tower Hamlets have engaged in, and the open, frank and honest dialogue that has always existed between his administrations and the Council's workforce and recognised Trade Unions.
- The invaluable contribution that frontline workers make across Tower Hamlets – from carers to nurses, Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers to refuse workers.
- That during the pandemic – in all conditions – the borough's refuse workers risked their lives to keep the borough's streets clean, sanitary, and safe.
- That they often risked their lives dealing with and disposing off used, contaminated Personal, Protective Equipment (PPE), ensuring that residents of the borough could remain safe from the threat of the Covid-19 virus.
- That many of these workers are on the most precarious and insecure forms of employment – namely agency contracts.
- That when these workers marched on the Town Hall in October last year, they were welcomed and listened to by the Mayor and his administration, who acknowledged their invaluable contribution in the declaration of a Waste Emergency the following month.
- That these workers' removal of their labour was not an attack on the people of this borough, but a legitimate struggle against a cost-of-living crisis uncaused by them.
- That the resolution of this strike reiterates the good, healthy relationship between the Mayor, the Council, Trade Unions and the workforce.
- That this has been recognised by Unite the Union, who have confirmed that 'Lutfur Rahman played a part in helping to resolve' the recent discussions around pay.
- That this strike has caused immense reputational damage to the Council.

Council believes:

- That working people have a right to democratically remove their labour through their Trade Unions, and that the recent strike was a legitimate exercising of this right.
- That the result achieved following constructive negotiations between the frontline workers, their Trade Union (Unite the Union), Council Officers and the Mayor's Office demonstrates what can be achieved when respective parties sit down and treat one another with courtesy, dignity and respect.
- That the ending of the strike demonstrates that there are cohesive, productive and robust relationships across the council, and how open dialogue and frank discussions can lead to resolutions and results.
- That where possible, all workers should be guaranteed the right to stable, secure work as and when they want it.
- That Mayor Lutfur Rahman has always looked to secure such employ for working people across Tower Hamlets – whether in the Leisure Service, Care Service and now in the Council's refuse services.

Council resolves:

- To reaffirm its commitment to support the deal struck between frontline workers and the Council yesterday.
- To recognise the role that the Mayor and officers played in the successful negotiation of the end of this strike.
- To confirm the insourcing of agency workers in the refuse service onto in-house council contracts.
- To support frontline workers and to continue to work with the Council's trade unions to support workers in the service.
- To work with officers, partners and stakeholders to address the Council's reputational damage.

The meeting ended at 10.09 p.m.