

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Amy Lee
- Councillor Ayas Miah

Councillor Sabina Khan was unable to join the meeting in person but joined remotely. It was noted that she would be unable to vote as she was not formally in attendance.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

Councillors Ahmodur Khan, Bodrul Choudhury, Abdul Wahid, Abdul Mannan, Maium Talukdar and Abdal Ullah declared a non-disclosable other interest in item 8, the Opposition Motion for Debate on Support for the Information and Advice Sector as they had links to the voluntary sector but not within the advice sector.

Councillor Mushtak Ahmed declared that as the Council's appointed representative on the East End Citizens Advice Bureau he had a non-disclosable other interest in relation to the advice sector but not in relation to the body referenced in the motion.

All Members remained in the chamber for the debate on the motion.

3. MINUTES

DECISION

1. Agreed that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary Council meeting of 27th September 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

5.1 Petition requesting Public Space Protection Order to ban nuisance vehicles

Mr Andrew Wood presented his petition regarding Public Space Protection Order to ban nuisance vehicles. He asked the Council to introduce a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to allow the Police and Council to deal with nuisance vehicles more effectively. He explained how noise disturbed residents with vehicles revving engines, performing tunnel runs and being a danger to residents. He said a PSPO could help control anti-social behaviour and should be applied across the borough of Tower Hamlets.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities responded to matters raised in the petition.

DECISION

That the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director for Communities for a written response within 28 days.

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

5.2 Petition requesting Refund for missed waste collections

Mr Micheal Bundy and Ms Lyn Misselbrook presented their petition requesting a refund of Council Tax for the missed rubbish and recycling collections during the summer. Mr Bundy said the missed collections resulted in rubbish being piled up, causing a health hazard and therefore council taxpayers ought to be compensated from the public purse.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency responded to matters raised in the petition.

DECISION

That the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director for Communities for a written response within 28 days.

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

5.3 Petition regarding Tower Hamlets Housing Allocation system for single people

Mr Terry McGrenera presented his petition concerning housing allocation for single people. He said he had brought the petition following the fatal fire in Shadwell. He stated that the housing allocation system needed to be applied more fairly to those requiring social housing who were single and that the focus should not be just on families.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding responded to matters raised in the petition.

DECISION

That the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director for Housing and Regeneration for a written response within 28 days.

(**Action by:** Paul Patterson, Interim Corporate Director for Housing and Regeneration)

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

LOCAL PLAN

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on the Local Plan that had been moved by Councillor Kabir Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury.

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

DECISION

This Council notes:

- That overcrowding in the borough had been left unchecked from the years 2015 to 2022, with over 14,000 residents now classified as living in acutely overcrowded conditions.
- That the development of new, affordable homes for rent has not kept pace with the rapid population growth and concomitant rise in said

overcrowding, with some years during the period 2015-2022 seeing as little as 140 homes completed in a single year.

- That the development of affordable housing has always played a central role of critical importance to Mayor Lutfur Rahman and his team, who delivered thousands of affordable, social homes for rent during his previous administrations.
- That this commitment has continued into this current administration's first term, with at least 4,000 affordable homes for rent pledged to be delivered, and over 1,000 already built or in the pipeline.
- That the Council's current Local Plan is due for a refresh, with the first version of this refreshed Plan – regulation 18 – passing through Cabinet on 25th October 2023.

This Council believes:

- That the delivery of affordable rented homes has slowed over the past seven years.
- That restrictive policies have prevented a greater number of affordable homes from being built, due to a limitation on height, density and the percentage of affordable units that must be delivered per development, alongside the tenure mix between affordable rented homes and intermediate properties.
- That the previous local plan was not ambitious enough to meet the growing demand for affordable and sustainable housing in Tower Hamlets.
- That the current proposed refresh will revolutionise and expedite the way that affordable housing is delivered in the years to come, tackling the overcrowding crisis at a much greater pace and providing decent, affordable homes to the residents of Tower Hamlets.
- That this is demonstrated in the proposed commitment to raising the affordable housing criteria expected of developers from the existing 35% threshold to a more ambitious 40%; a redressing of the 70:30 affordable/ intermediate split of this 40% to a revised 85:15 ratio – guaranteeing more *genuinely* affordable homes for residents; and through the prioritisation of the development of 3 and 4 bedroom properties to accommodate the growing family-sized population of the borough.
- That this refreshed Local Plan will see height and density prioritised to help maximise the delivery of affordable housing, with the whole borough becoming a Tall Building Zone (TBZ) where this does not impact on cultural or heritage conservation areas. This will include a pushing of the maximum building height threshold to 23 storeys.

- That this refreshed Local Plan will be a catalyst for further social and economic development for all residents, as well as protecting and enhancing the borough's local environment and green spaces.
- That this refreshed Local Plan will respect, enhance and incorporate heritage and conservation areas into all new developments.
- That this refreshed Local Plan should be made accessible to all residents in the borough – regardless of language, race or background – to ensure that a fair and holistic engagement process is ensured, and all resident voices are heard.

This Council resolves:

- To support and promote engagement with the Regulation 18 version of the refreshed local plan for all residents.
- To work with the BME media to help promote this engagement.
- To commend the Lead Member and Officers for their hard work in capturing the ambition of this administration regarding housebuilding within the document.
- To request regular updates on the journey of the refreshed Local Plan through the relevant stages of its progression.

(**Action by:** Paul Patterson, Interim Corporate Director for Housing and Regeneration)

8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE

MORE SUPPORT FOR THE INFORMATION AND ADVISE SECTOR

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on more support for the Information and Advice Sector that had been moved by Councillor Mufeedah Bustin and seconded by Councillor Sabina Akhtar.

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

Additions – Bold

Deletions – ~~Struck through~~

This council notes:

1. **That the administration is committed to helping our vulnerable and disadvantaged residents, especially those affected by the current cost of living crisis.**
2. The voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets provides critical support to our residents, particularly in times of crisis.
3. The council's support of the information and advice sector is unique: many council's have reduced grants for this vital service.
4. Despite government funding reducing by over £200M in 10 years, the previous administration continued to invest in the information and advice sector, providing £900,000pa per year to the advice consortium from 2018-2023.
5. **The current funding strategy has ensured a good spread of resources, better access to services for all that need them and value for money.**
6. The 2021 LBTH Poverty Review identified the impact of multiple factors effecting residents' livelihoods, including the pandemic, a reduced welfare state and Brexit.
7. The Cost of Living crisis, high inflation and increasing interest rates, as well as the increasing cost of rents, is having a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of Tower Hamlets residents.
8. The Poverty Review also identified the important of local intervention in creating a safety net, in particular:

"To make the biggest practical difference to residents, we recommend that the council works in partnership with other organisations and the community to achieve a step change....." through "early financial intervention - taking a whole systems approach to increasing incomes, reducing costs, and averting financial crisis and homelessness"
9. ~~That the 2023 Mayor's Community Fund has not increased the budgetary allocation for information and advice. Inflation means this is in effect a budgetary reduction, meaning reduced support for our residents.~~
10. **Despite budgetary challenges, administration has prioritised support for local information and advice services.**
11. **That the administration should be commended for maintaining current levels of funding to support the sector and service users.**

This council further believes:

12. That the information and advice sector is experiencing an increased demand on its services as more and more people are seeking support and advice on a range of matters.
13. That this demand will increase significantly once the rollout of Universal Credit is fully implemented in the next 12 months.
14. That cross-organisation initiatives such as Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) provides efficiencies of scale, training and up to date welfare information, as well as resource sharing across the sector.
15. THCAN also maintains the digital referral system which allows organisations and individuals to refer cases to advisors which reduces waiting times and ensure urgent issues can be dealt with, preventing residents from experiencing crises and destitution.
- ~~16. This is not the time to be reducing support to the information and advice sector, and the council should, instead be increasing support.~~
- 17. That resources have been protected by this administration to deliver critical information and advice provision across the borough.**

This council resolves:

- ~~18. To call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the Lead Member to review the allocation of funding to the information and advice sector and THCAN with a view to increasing it and ensuring ongoing support.~~
- 19. To work with the Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Lead Member to explore support arrangements for THCAN and the wider sector in future.**

Following debate the amendment moved by Councillor Saied Ahmed and the substantive motion as amended were put to the vote and were **agreed**.

DECISION

This council notes:

1. That the administration is committed to helping our vulnerable and disadvantaged residents, especially those affected by the current cost of living crisis.

2. The voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets provides critical support to our residents, particularly in times of crisis.
3. The council's support of the information and advice sector is unique: many council's have reduced grants for this vital service.
4. Despite government funding reducing by over £200M in 10 years, the previous administration continued to invest in the information and advice sector, providing £900,000pa per year to the advice consortium from 2018-2023.
5. The current funding strategy has ensured a good spread of resources, better access to services for all that need them and value for money.
6. The 2021 LBTH Poverty Review identified the impact of multiple factors effecting residents' livelihoods, including the pandemic, a reduced welfare state and Brexit.
7. The Cost-of-Living crisis, high inflation and increasing interest rates, as well as the increasing cost of rents, is having a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of Tower Hamlets residents.
8. The Poverty Review also identified the important of local intervention in creating a safety net, in particular:
9. "To make the biggest practical difference to residents, we recommend that the council works in partnership with other organisations and the community to achieve a step change....." through "early financial intervention - taking a whole systems approach to increasing incomes, reducing costs, and averting financial crisis and homelessness"
10. Despite budgetary challenges, administration has prioritised support for local information and advice services.
11. That the administration should be commended for maintaining current levels of funding to support the sector and service users.

This council further believes:

12. That the information and advice sector is experiencing an increased demand on its services as more and more people are seeking support and advice on a range of matters.
13. That this demand will increase significantly once the rollout of Universal Credit is fully implemented in the next 12 months.

14. That cross-organisation initiatives such as Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) provides efficiencies of scale, training and up to date welfare information, as well as resource sharing across the sector.
15. THCAN also maintains the digital referral system which allows organisations and individuals to refer cases to advisors which reduces waiting times and ensure urgent issues can be dealt with, preventing residents from experiencing crises and destitution.
16. That resources have been protected by this administration to deliver critical information and advice provision across the borough.

This council resolves:

17. To work with the Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Lead Member to explore support arrangements for THCAN and the wider sector in future.

(**Action by:** Robin Beattie, Interim Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)

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

9.1 Report of the Standards Advisory Committee: Adoption of the Updated Member / Officer Relations Protocol

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning presented the report of the Standards Advisory Committee concerning the adoption of the updated member/officer relations protocol. Members of the Council commented on the report.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. To adopt the revised Member/Officer Relations Protocol;
2. Agree that the updated Protocol be added to the Council's Constitution.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

Nil Items.

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 Shafi Ahmed regarding the Council's accounts. A supplemental question was asked.
- 11.2 Question from Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury about electric car charging. A supplemental question was asked.
- 11.3 Question from Councillor Amin Rahman regarding the LGA Peer Review. A supplemental question was asked.
- 11.4 Question from Councillor Marc Francis about homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation. A supplemental question was asked.
- 11.5 Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain about income generation from parks. No supplemental question was asked.

Questions 11.6 to 11.28 were not put due to lack of time.

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

12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Motions 12.1 was not considered due to lack of time.

The meeting ended at 10.30 p.m.