

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.40 P.M. ON MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Adults and Health Services
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Sabina Khan

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Saied Ahmed
Councillor Kabir Ahmed
Councillor Abu Chowdhury

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Simon Baxter	(Interim Director of Public Realm)
Raj Mistry	(Interim Corporate Director of Communities)
Ashraf Ali	(Service Head, Highways & Transportation (Interim))
Denise Radley	(Corporate Director, Health & Adult Social Care & Deputy Chief Executive)
Stephen Bramah	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Improvement)
Ahsan Khan	(Head of Strategic Finance)
Julie Lorrain	(Corporate Director Resources)
Somen Banerjee	(Director of Public Health)
Paul Buckenham	(Head of Development Management)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Adam Price (Strategy & Policy Lead)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllr Sabina Khan who joined the meeting online.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

Members requested an update on the Housing Options Service concerns that have been raised by the committee previously.

Members asked Officers to continue working on securing more Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee meetings.

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 September 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Members raised Concerns about Cllr Kabir Hussian not attending the committee and allowing officers to defend a political decision.

4.1 Liveable Streets Bethnal Green Consultation outcome and measures 20/09/2023

Councillors Asma Begum and Sirajul Islam presented the reasons for call-in on behalf of the Call-in members and proposed alternative course of action as set out in the report.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Members stated concern that the appropriate Cabinet Member for the decision was not present to provide political context and understanding of the decision. Without the appropriate Cabinet Member, it undermines the call-in process. It should not be left to Senior Officers to justify political decisions of the council.
- Do you think the consultation allowed for residents to give a range of options on Liveable streets and allow for different mitigations? Cllr Begum felt that the two consultations, Bethnal Green and Brick Lane, could have been a real platform for the council to engage with residents in a meaningful way. But instead, the report states that neither consultation engaged with hard-to-reach residents and did not

give residents much space to give feedback on the other options than the removal of the Liveable Streets program. Cllr Islam highlighted the consultation could have started a process of uniting the community around a better solution for Bethnal Green, but this was a waste of an opportunity.

Simon Baxter, Interim Director of Public Realm, Raj Mistry, Interim Corporate Director of Communities, Ashraf Ali, Service Head, Highways & Transportation (Interim) set out the context of the Cabinet Decision and reviewed the key elements of the decision.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Members asked if the call-in should still go ahead if the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency was not present to answer questions, or another member of Cabinet? The Chair confirmed that the call-in would still go ahead with officers in attendance.
- How did the council aim to reach hard to reach residents for the consultation? Officers confirmed that a highway scheme consultation would not usually go to this level of engagement, but the council needs to learn lessons on how to roll out consultations like this for highways are undertaken in future.
- Many headteachers within the borough have contacted the committee about concerns about the reversal of Liveable Streets and highlighting the safety of children. How will the council respond to these concerns and what does that say for stakeholder engagement during the consultation? Had the council previously engaged with schools when concerns were raised earlier in 2023? Officers confirmed the process around the statutory consultation that happens around any council highways scheme and the report contains the stakeholder responses, which was more transparent than any usual consultation undertaken by the council in a highways scheme. Feedback from schools was considered in the consultation.
- The report states that traffic has been moved off main roads into small residential roads, but where was the evidence of this? Officers confirmed they will respond in writing to the committee on this issue.
- It is concerning that Officers were instructed to spend time and resources devising a 3rd option, a compromise between the other 2 options, only for the Mayor and Cabinet to decide to go with option 1, the removal of the scheme.
- This has proven to be a divisive issue across 12 months for residents around Bethnal green, can officers reflect on how this process has affected residents but also what can be done to build towards community cohesion? Officers confirmed that it was a challenging project and a lot of data analysis was done to understand the issue fully, more than any previous highways scheme. Officers are always looking for new sustainable transport initiatives. But more should have been done to reach out to the different communities.

- Do officers see anything in the alternatives suggested call-in that would be beneficial for residents?
- Why do officers feel that the evidence provided by stakeholders like the emergency services were not provided in full? Officers stated that the report had comprehensive evidence from these services. Further data is contained within the report appendix.

The Chair confirmed that a letter from Head teachers within the borough outlining concerns with the decision was circulated to the committee before the meeting.

After hearing from the Call-in Members and Officers, the Committee considered the reasons for the Call-in and discussed if the committee should take further action.

DECISION

The Committee RESOLVED that no further action would be taken on the call in.

5. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

5.1 Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting Q1 2023-24

The report was presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, Denise Radley, Corporate Director, Health & Adult Social Care & Deputy Chief Executive and Stephen Bramah, Head of Corporate Strategy & Improvement.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Members asked for reports to come to committee in a timely manner, before they go to Cabinet, to ensure good scrutiny. Officers confirmed the next report will be considered by the committee in December, before the December Cabinet meeting.
- The council has provided the measures and targets that it feels are important to report on, but there are areas that are missing that residents need to be informed about. Can officers provide reassurance that there has been improvement on recycling targets? Can more details be shared about the council's net zero targets? Officers confirmed that measures about street cleaning, net zero and recycling may be reported elsewhere, but officers will bring these lines to committee in future reporting. Officers reported on the communication campaigns around recycling, among a range of actions on recycling.
- What work has been done to tackle the issues of low net additions to the housing stock? Officers stated how the housing outturn is considered for reporting and is best looked at in an annual review.
- Can officers confirm why some data appears to be missing, on areas like waste collections? Officers confirmed that the council is moving itself inline with other councils on waste collections, including missed

collections and the data will take a while to be presented to the committee while this is prepared.

- How does the council plan to keep residents up to date on decision making processes, to ensure resident perception of the council? Officers confirmed that the Chief Executive has asked for this to be a priority to ensure resident perception is higher, including decision making understanding. The committee will be made aware of plans around this at a future meeting.
- Can officers explain why care leavers in education or training has fallen and what is the council plan to support this group? Officers confirmed they will take these concerns back to the service for an answer.
- Residents have raised concerns in a time of overcrowding, about the difficulties with engaging with social rents.
- Can officers provide more context around the data presented in the report about safety for women and girls? Officers confirmed that Women's Aid has a contract with the council and feedback remains very high in this area.
- What is the council doing to ensure there is a diversity in the top earners in the council's workforce? Officers confirmed the work that is going on in each directorate to reflect on its own data and find what actions are needed to ensure residents can see themselves in the council workforce.

The Chair confirmed that Officers will bring a presentation on the annual residents survey to the next committee meeting.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

5.2 Budget Monitoring 23/24 Q1

The report was presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, Julie Lorrain, Corporate Director Resources, Ahsan Khan, Head of Strategic Finance.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Can officers detail the risks and investment of the in-sourcing of Tower Hamlets Homes? Officers stated that while the in sourcing is happening in November and the report covers the previous financial quarter, the council will be closely evaluating the ongoing risks of the in sourcing. But as the council has been responsible for Tower Hamlets Homes as a HMO, so the in sourcing allows for greater control over this area going forward.
- Initial feedback from the recent LGA Governance Review, saw concerns of under resourcing of member development and member support. Will the council look at the large resource placed in the Mayor's Office and support to just the committee chairs, and share this further to all members of the council? Cllr Ahmed highlighted that a

new report is being prepared on member development that should help address the concerns raised by the LGA.

- Concerns have been raised by staff within the council, on the housing options service. What is the council doing to address these issues raised and how is this affecting the budgetary concerns? Officers stated that concerns on homelessness London wide is driving up costs in this area, rather than any internal concerns from staff. Cllr Ahmed commented that housing has been an issue in the borough that was not addressed by the last administration and the current administration is now actually dealing with homelessness.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

5.3 Combatting Drugs Strategy

The report was presented by Cllr Abu Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Somen Banerjee, Director of Public Health, Adam Price, Strategy & Policy Lead.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- This reads like what a modern drugs strategy should be like, including talking about the lived experience within the strategy. However, the strategy needs to include tackling poverty as a key aim, along with greater gender sensitivity. Cllr Chowdhury agreed that tackling poverty will be considered in developing the strategy.
- How do we support younger residents who are vulnerable to not be targeted by drug dealing? Officers confirmed there will be engagement with young people and schools, with workshops planned.
- A focus on sexual exploitation and drug use should be recognised within this strategy.

The Chair welcomed members to continue to engage with the Strategy and share further comments with Cllr Abu Chowdhury and Officers as the Strategy develops.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

6. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

6.1 Tower Hamlets New Local Plan

The report was presented by Cllr Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding Paul Buckenham, Head of Development Management.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Are there any outreach events planned around the new local plan? Officers confirmed that events will start in November, with 12 events currently planned supported by a full communications plan, including social media and local newspapers.
- How does the new local plan react to recent planning policy framework reforms? Officers confirmed that the reforms are in the planning stage and the new local plan will collate with the current policy framework so it can be submitted to the government by 2025.
- It is important to ensure what is in the new local plan is reflective of the character of the borough and residents that live in it. The plan needs to be strong in its aims, to ensure developers that wish to work with the council, are always mindful of what this borough represents. Cllr Ahmed highlighted areas within the new local plan that reflect the aims of the borough, but also officers are empowered to challenge developers at every stage of developments. There is a 6 week consultation starting in November 2023 for residents to detail what is important to the borough.
- What are the key milestones of the new local plan? Cllr Ahmed detailed the key dates the new local plan will work to, including adoption of the new local plan by the council by late 2025.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

7. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Nil items.

9. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the action log.

10. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Update

11. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

13. 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.

14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

16. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL) CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 9.26 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee