

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 19:33 ON MONDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 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 Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Shafi Ahmed	
Councillor James Kings	

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Sabina Khan

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Steve Halsey	(Chief Executive)
Robin Beatie	(Director of Strategy, Transformation & Improvement)
Sarah Vallyelly	(Corporate Research Lead)
Martin Roberts	(Senior Research Officer)
Kelly Duggan	(Head of Youth Justice Service)
Susannah Beasley-Murray	(Director Children's Social Care)
Chris Leslie	(Head of Strategic and Corporate Finance)
Lisa Fraser	(Director of Education)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Craig Mobey	(Strategy and Policy Lead)
Daniel Keer	(Strategy and Policy Lead)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Christopher Boylett (Head of Revenues and Benefits)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Abdul Mannan and Maisha Begum gave apologies. Councillors Shafi Ahmed and James King attended as Substitutes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

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

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 October 2023 and 23 October be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE SPOTLIGHT

Steve Halsey, Chief Executive gave a presentation on the Annual Residents' Survey, the People First Strategy and the findings of the recent Local Government Association Governance Review, with Robin Beatie, Director of Strategy, Transformation & Improvement, Sarah Vallyelly, Corporate Research Lead and Martin Roberts, Senior Research Officer.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- There is a positive perception of Tower Hamlets as a place to live, especially with residents who class themselves as service users.
- Some indicators on resident satisfaction, including "how the council is doing compared to a year ago" are worryingly low, can officers explain? Officers reflected on how residents have engaged with the annual survey, including a trend in residents answering with "don't know". An area that needs improvement is how easy it is to reach the council via phone on a range of services and work will be urgently done to ensure staff are engaging with their softphones more. Furthermore, an annual survey is not enough, and the council will be doing more engagement across the year. Officers will bring back plans for resident engagement to the committee.
- Will bringing the leisure services back in house see an improvement on resident satisfaction on these services? Officers confirmed that the transition team will be looking at the infrastructure of the leisure centres to see what needs improvement, but generally, bringing these services

in house will allow greater council control to respond to resident concerns.

- The LGA report on the recent governance review should come to this committee for member discussion.
- The issue of trust was raised during the LGA governance review, between officers and members, and also, between members. What as officers are your initial thoughts on this? Officers highlighted the initial discussions around how officers can ensure members understand officers are undertaking their duties. And how officers can support members as we are only one year into a new administration. The clear aim is to work towards officers and members working together as one council.
- Coming out the of LGA governance review, concerns were raised about the lack of diversity within the decision-making process. Officers stated that making changes to diversity within the workforce is not a quick change, however, there are around 7 senior positions currently being recruited for, with a view to see the borough represented in these new positions.
- What will the council be doing to build trust back up between residents and the council, as this was an issue in the recent residents' survey. Officers confirmed that trust is an issue, and more work needs to be done to look into this issue, as it does not seem to be an easy fix after the initial look through the results.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the presentation.

5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Youth Justice Annual Plan

Kelly Duggan, Head of Youth Justice Service, Susannah Beasley-Murray, Director Children's Social Care and Lisa Fraser, Director of Education, presented the Youth Justice Annual Plan.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- The chair stated that it is hard to correctly scrutinise this report, as it was published only hours before this committee meeting.
- Will nutritional skills be a part of the health offer? Officers confirmed that this will be a key area of the plan and will help children transition into adulthood with healthy habits.
- With the recent legislation changes to Nitrous oxide, what support will be offered to children and parents within the borough? Officers stated that the council will be working very closely with the police and materials have already been made available in residents hubs, which have proven popular with children.

- What is the parenting support that the council offers to parents in the borough? Officers highlighted the range of classes and 1:1 support that can be offered.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

5.2 Council tax discounts and premiums for empty properties and second homes.

Chris Leslie, Head of Strategic and Christopher Boylett, Corporate Finance, and Head of Revenues and Benefits presented the report on Council tax discounts and premiums for empty properties and second homes.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Can officers confirm how this report will affect short term rentals, like Airbnbs? Officers stated that the council is trying to work out this area, but it seems like these will be classed as second homes and will be within scope of the policy.
- How many empty homes do we have in this borough? Officers confirmed around 14,000 homes were viewed to be empty, with around only 800 being empty for a year. There are not many homes in the borough that remain empty, but more can be done to increase the speed of homes being occupied.
- How much income will this generate for the council? Officers reported that it could generate upwards of £600,000 of income, however this will depend on how many properties remain empty.
- Money raised from this policy should be considered for building new homes in the borough.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

6. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

6.1 Community Engagement Strategy

Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities, and Craig Mobey, Strategy and Policy Lead gave a presentation on the Community Engagement Strategy.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- The joined-up approach detailed in the draft strategy is a good idea to bring together all the work that is happening across the borough.
- The recent engagement events at the town hall, how are officers capturing the feedback and how will the engagement be continued afterwards? Officers stated that there has been good feedback on the

recent events, at the town hall and across the community and it is being developed further along with the strategy.

- The strategy needs to find something to replace the “ask the Mayor” feature, as residents still need a way to engage with the Mayor, face to face.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the presentation.

7. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The Committee agreed to submit Questions to Cabinet on the following items:

- 6.1 Single Homeless Hostels – Contracts
- 6.2 Tower Hamlets Young People’s Supported Housing Pathway Contract Extensions
- 6.7 Review of the Major Events Policy, Victoria Park

8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

Members asked for an update on performance indicators on waste and recycling.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the action log.

9. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Update

10. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

11. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

12. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

14. 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

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

16. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 20:52

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee