

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.40 P.M. ON MONDAY, 8 JANUARY 2024**

**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 Mannan     | Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration   |
| Councillor Marc Francis     |  |
| Councillor Asma Islam       |  |

**Members In Attendance Virtually:**

Councillor Sabina Khan  
Councillor Maisha Begum

**Other Councillors Present in Person:**

|                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Councillor Saied Ahmed | Cabinet Member for Resources |
|------------------------|------------------------------|

**Co-optees Present in Person:**

Jahid Ahmed  
Halima Islam

**Officers Present in Person:**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>Raj Mistry</b> | (Interim Corporate Director of Communities)                             |
| Denise Radley     | (Corporate Director Health Adult Social Care & (Deputy Chief Executive) |
| Abdulrazak Kassim | (Director Finance, Procurement and Audit)                               |
| Julie Lorraine    | (Corporate Director for Resources)                                      |
| Chris Leslie      | (Head of Strategic and Corporate Finance)                               |
| Daniel Kerr       | (Strategy and Policy Lead)  |
| Thomas French     | (Committee Services Officer (Committees))                               |

**Officers In Attendance Virtually:**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Afazul Hoque   | Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)    |
| Ellie Kershaw  | Director of Integrated Growth & Development) |
| John Harrison  | (Director of Finance)                        |
| Lisa Frasier   | (Director of Education)                      |
| Paul Patterson | (Interim Corporate Director Housing And      |

Regeneration)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Councillors Abdul Malik, Maisha Begum, and Sabina Khan, who joined 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 enquired about the call in that was rejected about the council permit scheme and asked for time at a future committee meeting to discuss the scheme.

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

**RESOLVED**

That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 November 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

**4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

**4.1 Budget Report 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-27**

Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources presented the Budget Report 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-27 to the committee, with Denise Radley, Corporate Director Health Adult Social Care & Deputy Chief Executive, Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources, Raj Mistry, Interim Corporate Director of Communities, Abdulrazak Kassim, Director Finance, Procurement and Audit and Chris Leslie, Head of Strategic and Corporate Finance.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Is the council getting the best value from the waste services in the borough? Will the investment be enough to turn the service around? Cllr Saied Ahmed reflected on the current state of the waste service and reported on how the investment will be used across the service, including evening and weekend collections and additional staff. Officers confirmed that the service has collected feedback from residents on the waste service and targeted response in waste has been provided, like

timed business waste collections, a media campaign on recycling, and action on fly tipping.

- What benefit will residents see from the large investment in waste services? Officers detailed the range of improvements that will be rolled out across the borough, including, bringing waste service workers in house and improvements to the waste service vehicle fleet. Cllr Saied Ahmed outlined how the waste emergency that was declared last year will be tackled through this investment.
- The Cabinet Member should state if he is completely reassured that the council tax increase will not affect the most vulnerable in the borough.
- How sustainable is the continual draw down of the council's reserves? Is this advisable with the recent council budget overspend? Officers detailed how the use of reserves is needed but is due to an ambitious budget rather than a draw down to pay for services, this is part of the planned ear marked usage of reserves. The current forecast of the budget contains an overspend, which is based on a worst-case scenario planning and the council is working to ensure that it does not finish the year on an overspend.
- The resident support scheme funding comes from a draw down, but funding is taken away elsewhere in the budget? Officers detailed how the resident support scheme will be funded, including from government schemes, so the cost of the scheme is being funded across different parts of the budget and will not see a decrease in funds. Some of the funding will include admin of the scheme.
- While the council tax increase may seem small across the residents in the borough, some residents are seeing large increases in council rent, will a rent cap be considered? Officers detailed why the maximum rent increase was sought by the council and how this will see investment in housing across the borough, making more homes for residents that need it. Cllr Saied Ahmed highlighted how while there will be an increase in rent, there are also services like free school meals and other services for residents who need support, so the most vulnerable will be getting the most support in this budget.
- The recent Local Government Association governance review referred to the Mayor's Office as a "council within a council". Can the lead member justify the cost of the Mayor's office within this budget? Cllr Saied Ahmed outlined how the Mayor's Office deals with a large backlog in housing issues and other areas that need urgent support.
- How will the council be engaging with residents and businesses over the increase business and council tax? Officers outlined how the council engaged with residents previously and this can be shared with the committee.
- How does the Tower Hamlets Council Budget compare to other similar authorities? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated the council benchmarks against other councils and will review this quarterly, in areas like adult social care. However, Tower Hamlets does have unique issues unlike other councils.

The committee discussed recommendations for the budget including a greater breakdown on the waste investment, cost of living support, parking, adult social care, support for residents with rent increases and cost effectiveness of the Mayor's Office.

**RESOLVED**

The committee noted the report.

**5. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

**RESOLVED:**

Members noted the forward plan.

**6. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

**RESOLVED:**

Members noted the Update

**7. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG**

Members queried the following updates:

- The question on the staffing concerns in housing options services needs to be reconsidered for an answer from officers.
- Questions on waste and recycling need to be reviewed and provided again to the committee.

The chair asked members to re-submit the questions to officers.

**8. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items

**9. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

Nil items

**10. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**

Nil items

**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 20:49

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee