

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 17:32 ON MONDAY, 25 MARCH 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 Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman	
Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
Councillor Kabir Ahmed	((Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding)
Councillor Kabir Hussain	(Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency)

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Steve Halsey	(Chief Executive)
Denise Radley	(Corporate Director Health Adult Social Care)
Julie Lorraine	(Corporate Director for Resources)
Karen Swift	(Director of Housing Housing)
Ashraf Ali	(Acting Director of Public Realm)
Fiona Heyland	(Environmental Services Improvement Manager)
Abdul Khan	(Service Manager)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Filick Miah	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Steve Reddy	(Corporate Director Children's Services)
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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Halima Islam gave apologies as she was joining online. Jahid Ahmed gave apologies.

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 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 and 26 February be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

4.1 Climate Emergency

Cllr Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency, with Abdul Khan, Service Manager, Cllr Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding gave a presentation on on the progress of the Councils Climate Emergency Declaration made in 2019 and Net Zero Carbon commitments.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- The council is planning on a 75 per cent reduction in council admissions, what will the offsetting look like? Officers stated 75 per cent was chosen as a lot of energy usage is decided by national policy, so a lot of work has been done to understand how much carbon offsetting can be done locally. The council is looking at partnering with key stakeholders in terms of energy within the borough, to share the infrastructure of greener energy.
- Can the committee have an update on the boiler replacement scheme? Officers detailed the procurement of the scheme and how there is current engagement around home owners being more energy efficient. The council was delayed on this scheme when seeking contractors to carry out this project.
- How is the council utilising the net carbon zero fund? Officers detailed the section 106 money that is gained from developers to allow for net zero carbon projects, local offsetting is being considered but more work needs to be done to understand the impact on the tariff the council would have.

- Other councils have an earlier date for their own Net Zero Carbon target , why is our council date later of 2045? Does the council have the political agenda to tackle the climate crisis? Cllr Kabir Ahmed stated that the current national political landscape has made it harder for the council to make greater improvements on net zero carbon goals. This work comes with a cost, that the council seems to have to work on alone, without the support of the government.
- As Tower Hamlets Homes has been brought in house, what is the council doing to ensure incoming staff and current staff are fully educated on saving energy in their own roles? Cllr Kabir Ahmed stated that the moving into the new town hall has been an opportunity to engage with staff on energy saving measures.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the presentation.

5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Strategic Delivery and Performance Report Year 2 Quarter 3

Mayor Lutfur Rahman presented the Strategic Delivery and Performance Report with Steve Halsey, Chief Executive, Denise Radley, Corporate Director Health Adult Social Care, Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources, Karen Swift, Director of Housing, Ashraf Ali, Acting Director of Public Realm, Fiona Heyland, Environmental Services Improvement Manager.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Can targets on homelessness that have been reduced to be seen as more favourable be explained? The Mayor reflected on the targets within the report and stated that the cabinet is always looking at targets to ensure residents feel like the council is working towards improvement. Officers stated targets are always reviewed to ensure they reflect meaningful reporting.
- What can the administration do to ensure they are engaging with Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other back bench members on performance? The Mayor welcomed any member of the committee or across the council to give feedback on any measures in the report. Members of the committee suggested that street cleaning targets needs reviewing in future reporting. Members asked for targets on residents and families who are placed in hotel placements beyond the 6 week limit.
- The funding that has been set aside for waste management, when do you think residents will see the benefit of this? Greater action needs to be taken on recycling. The Mayor stated that waste management is a concern in the borough. The council has declared a waste emergency and the plans for this are starting to be put in place. Including working with schools and faith groups and increased work on the tall buildings in the borough. Officers reported that recycling rate is only around 16 per cent in the borough, but a recently approved recycling plan at

cabinet will see the council start to tackle low recycling. A growing borough population is having an impact on dealing with waste as a council.

- Cross contamination of waste is a concern, especially with weekend visitors to the borough, what is the council doing? Officers reported on what the council is doing for popular locations in the borough and waste, including ensuring markets having separated waste bins.
- What is the lead member doing to understand the level of missed collections in the borough? Is data collection on missed collections being collected correctly? Cllr Kabir Ahmed detailed actions that are being taken to work with Tower Hamlets homes as it has been brought inhouse, but there is more the council can do on missed collections.
- The targets on BAME staff in the council is still below target. What initiatives is the council doing to change this? And are BAME staff valued and supported to move up within the council? Officers highlighted the range of measures that the council is doing to support BAME staff, including recruitment and increasing training for staff.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

5.2 Budget Monitoring 23/24 Quarter 3

Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, presented the Budget Monitoring report, with Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources, Cllr Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Can difficulties around getting landlord Incentive payments be explained, and what impact that is having on tenants? Can issues of residents claiming homeless benefit claims also be explained? Cllr Kabir Ahmed detailed the impact that mortgage increases are having an impact on tenants, but there are areas the council can help with. The council has invested in housing department, which should soon be seen at raising the efficiency levels of dealing with homeless claims. London wide, temporary accommodation is over £90m and this council is in a better placed financially to deal with these claims. Officers confirmed that staffing has been redeployed to look at claims to ensure there is larger capacity for dealing with claims.
- Through out the cost of living crisis, the council is spending more on homelessness and adult social care, what is the financial management for this? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that the council needs to take a medium strategy to see where the cost pressures are and budget appropriately and have these services supported by commercial interests. Cllr Kabir Ahmed highlighted a range of commercial activity the council is planning on, but reducing residents using temporary housing services is the main goal, so residents are in secure accommodation and the council is spending less in this area.

- Members requested a follow up on housing benefit claims and those with temporary accommodation.
- Members requested that the means testing of council tax support and the tax on empty homes should be included in future reporting.
- What are the current plans on making homes more energy efficient? Cllr Kabir Ahmed stated that the council is currently looking at a range of methods of making homes energy efficient.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

6. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

7. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

Members requested that the action log is always presented at each meeting, even to just highlight ongoing actions.

Cllr Marc Franics requested an update on the housing options service.

8. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

Cllr March Francis asked about an update on resources scrutiny lead, and what scrutiny activity has been enabled in place of having a lead. Officers confirmed that the committee has collectively reviewed the budget and the committee previously had an additional session on the cost of living.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the updates.

9. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

10. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

11. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

The Chair informed the committee that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be moved to Tuesday evenings in 2024/25.

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 20:05

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee