

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 17 JULY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rachel Blake, Councillor Ohid Ahmed and Councillor Abdul Malik.

Councillor Ayas Miah and Councillor Maisha Begum joined the meeting online.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests declared by members.

3. MINUTES

DECISION

1. Agreed that the minutes of the Annual General meeting of the Council of 15th May 2024, be approved as a correct record of the proceedings, save for the correction at item number 2, that Councillor Suluk Ahmed was appointed as Deputy Speaker of the Council and not Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled who is the Speaker. The Speaker was authorised to sign the minutes 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 the Council to re-open the Boundary Estate Community Launderette.

Johnathan Moberly, Lorraine Hart and Abdul Goffar presented their petition relating to the re-opening of the Boundary Estate Community Launderette. Mr Moberly said many people in the community had concerns about the closure of the launderette in February 2024. He said the launderette was a vital community hub and was used by many residents of the Estate. He said whilst

they welcomed the re-opening of the launderette following negotiations with the Council, they were seeking a permanent solution regarding the location and status of the launderette. He said they'd like to see the premises designated to the 'community asset' portfolio and not as it is under the 'commercial asset' category.

Members asked questions of the petitioners before Council debated the matter as the petition had received over 2,800 signatures.

Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and Cost-of-Living responded to matters raised in the petition.

DECISION:

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

(Action by: Simon Baxter, Corporate Director for Communities)

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

MOTION ON BANGLADESHI DIASPORA IN TOWER HAMLETS

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on the Bangladeshi Diaspora in Tower Hamlets that had been moved by Councillor Musthak Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury.

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

DECISION

This Council notes:

- That Tower Hamlets has always been a place known for its tolerance and welcoming of communities from around the world.
- That one of the largest of these communities to make Tower Hamlets its home is the Bangladeshi community. Comprising over 1/3 of the borough's population, this community has made its home in Tower Hamlets for over 100 years.

- That they have continued the rich tradition of immigration to Tower Hamlets. Starting with the French Huguenots; and continuing through the Jewish; Irish; and the African Caribbean communities, the Bangladeshi population – alongside the more recent arrival of a thriving Somali community – has enriched the borough and left a lasting and positive legacy in the borough.
- The first Bangladeshis to come to Tower Hamlets were Lascars, seamen from the Indian subcontinent who served aboard European vessels. 896 of these Lascars were killed during the Great War, demonstrating the Bangladeshi community's pride in coming to Britain.
- That one of the oldest institutions of the Bangladeshi community was founded by one of these lascars, Shah Jalal Coffee House, which was established in 1920 at 76 Commercial Street. This set the precedent for the vibrant and ubiquitous presence of Bangladeshis in the catering business – not only in Tower Hamlets, but across the UK.
- That the majority of the borough's Bangladeshi population came to London in the 1950s and 1960s, seeking better lives for themselves and their families following the partition of India. They worked in textile factories; car plants; and the rag trade, as well the now world-renowned curry-houses across the Country, and particularly in Tower Hamlets. They came to help rebuild Britain after the war.
- That this community stood against the violent racism espoused by the National Front in the 1970s that led to the tragic and callous murder of Altab Ali and continued violence and attacks against Bangladeshis. They stood alongside black; Jewish; and LGTBQ residents of Tower Hamlets to drive them out.
- That this continued against the BNP in the 1990s; and the EDL in the 2000s and 2010s.
- That this community has worked tirelessly through the voluntary and community sectors to support people – regardless of their background – to tackle poverty; inequality; and strengthen community cohesion.
- That by the 1980s and 1990s, Bangladeshis represented a key component of the cultural; social; political; and economic fabric of Tower Hamlets, with a booming business sector and representatives in Local and National government.
- That these local activists who went on to be elected representatives in Local Government in Tower Hamlets Council, contributed to the development and improvement of the social; economic; and cultural fabric of Tower Hamlets. They were and are trailblazers and provided leadership.

- That this community – just like all other immigrants who have made this borough their home alongside the working class Eastenders who accepted and coexisted alongside them – have together made a massive contribution to the cultural; social; and economic fabric – not only of Tower Hamlets and London – but the UK more broadly. They all represent what is best about Britain, and the benefits of diversity; multiculturalism; and bringing the best out each other.

This Council believes:

- That Tower Hamlets is the Capital of not only British Bangladeshis, with over 35% residents of Bangladeshi heritage – but of the Bangladeshi diaspora globally.
- It is also a community of firsts. The first British Bangladeshi member of the House of Lords was from Tower Hamlets. The first British Bangladeshi MP was from Tower Hamlets. And the first Executive Mayor from a non-white background in the whole of Europe was from Tower Hamlets and is of Bangladeshi heritage.
- That the innovation; entrepreneurial drive; and community spirit of the Bangladeshi people has contributed to making Tower Hamlets a ‘go-to’ borough – a place where visitors can enjoy the best food; sights; and cultural attractions that London has to offer.
- That this is embodied by the Brick Lane, Spitalfields and Banglatown area – the hub and heart of Bangladeshi industry and culture outside of Bangladesh in the world.
- This is reflected in the over £3billion that Bangladeshi businesses contributed to the borough’s economy last year.
- That the community benefits brought by Bangladeshis to Tower Hamlets – their willingness to share; to be neighbourly; to offer support to young and old; and to work with other groups – demonstrates the best of our borough, and embodies the ‘go-to’ spirit that makes Tower Hamlets such a special place to live.
- That without the industry; culture; and spirit of the Bangladeshi community, Tower Hamlets – and Britain – would be much worse off.
- That we should celebrate and promote the history and contributions of the Bangladeshi community, and ensure that this promoted across Tower Hamlets; London; and the UK as a whole.
- Tower Hamlets – and all of the residents within it regardless of ethnic or religious background – are a microcosm of the best of Britain.

This Councils resolves:

- To host an exhibition in the Town Hall chronicling the history of Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, and celebrating the cultural capital they have brought to our borough.
- To thank them for their contributions to Tower Hamlets, and the social; community; and economic benefits they have brought and continue to bring.
- To continue to develop and strengthen the close community ties between all groups in the borough.
- To continue to oppose negative depictions of this and all other groups, as it has always done, and will always continue to do.

(Action by: Simon Baxter, Corporate Director for Communities)

8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE

MOTION FOR DEBATE ON TACKLING POVERTY PROGRAMME

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on the Tackling Poverty Programme that had been moved by Councillor Asma Islam and seconded by Councillor Amy Lee. Council also considered an amendment proposed by Councillor Asma Islam and seconded by Councillor Amy Lee and an amendment proposed by Councillor Maium Talukdar and seconded by Councillor Abdul Wahid as set out in the tabled papers.

Amendment Proposed by Councillor Asma Islam and seconded by Councillor Amy Lee

Additions Underlined
Deletions Struck through

This council notes:

- The United Kingdom is the sixth largest economy in the world and London is the fifth wealthiest city in the world. The Borough of Tower Hamlets has faced disproportionately high levels of child poverty and deprivation for decades.
- Currently 56% of children in our borough live in poverty, the highest percentage in the UK.
- Tower Hamlets unemployment rate is at 6.3% and has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in London disproportionately affecting the BAME population.
- There have been several, high quality, pieces of research conducted on poverty in the Borough such as the LBTH 2021 Poverty Review and the Toynbee Hall Poverty Review.
- The 2021 Tower Hamlets Poverty Review found that the primary causes of poverty in our borough are:
 - Joblessness
 - Insecure, low paid work

- Rising living costs
- Housing costs, insecurity and undersupply
- Inadequate and arbitrary social security system
- Pensioner Poverty has risen dramatically since 2014 especially those who live in private rental accommodation.
- It's estimated that residents of Tower Hamlets could have more than £110 million in unclaimed benefits and support.
- The 2023 O&S Review of Food Insecurity in our borough found that in 2023 there had been a rise of £643 to the annual average food shop.
- In work poverty has been on the rise since 2010 with more than 75% of children in poverty in 2023 living in a household where someone is in work.
- Over 60% of families in receipt of tax credits were in work and just under 50% of those in receipt of housing benefit were also in work.
- That 'Tackling the Cost-of-Living Crisis' is a key component of the Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan as well as other anti-poverty measures such as Universal Free School Meals and 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- The socio-economic duty, section 1 of the Equality Act (2010) requires public bodies to adopt transparent and effective measures to address the inequalities that result from differences in occupation, education, place of residence or social class.

This council believes:

- That combatting child poverty/ poverty and deprivation should be its most important objective.
- Child poverty is linked to household income – Tower hamlets has the highest income earners (second highest in London) as well as the lowest earners or in unemployment.
- The austerity programme started under the previous government, weakened the social safety net and public services resulting in lower living standards and life expectancy for our residents.
- Brexit, Covid and the cost-of-living crisis added further economic shocks to the national economy and public services.
- Under successive governments there was significant reform of the welfare system with the introduction of Universal Credit, the 'Under-Occupancy Charge' (also known as the bedroom tax), the two-child benefit cap and other measures which have had a detrimental effect on the standard of living for families and individuals in our borough.
- That with political will and co-operation we can end the scourge of child poverty which is ultimately linked to tackling poverty for families in our borough.
- That this can only be achieved through long term planning and consensus building.
- That eradicating poverty is not only morally just, but also a logical way we can deliver best value for our residents.
- That this council should build on the work of successive political administrations and draw together existing work to form a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy with measurable targets and goals.

- That any comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to bring together all of the council's directorates, partner orgs (Met Police, Health and Care Partnership, Tower Hamlets Together, Faith Groups etc.) and VSCOs.
- That any strategy must centre the needs and voices of those who have experienced or currently experience poverty.
- That a comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy is complemented by the LBTH Partnership Plan and Strategic Plan.

This council resolves to:

- Adopt a 15-year tackling poverty strategy, with 3 phases for each 5-year milestone.
- Request that the Executive Mayor and Chief executive of Tower Hamlets explore the option for the council to begin a tackling poverty commission to produce the anti-poverty strategy.
- Request that the LBTH Overview and Scrutiny Committee, form a special 'Ending Child Poverty' Task and Finish Group that will draw membership from each scrutiny subcommittee to ensure that it's work is a collegiate and cross-party effort. T&F Group will be responsible for producing a comprehensive report and recommended strategy document to present to the Mayor and Cabinet upon completion. This will support the work of the commission as well as the overall strategy.
- Ensure the strategy is adopted at full council as an overarching policy for the entire council and our partners which should make the strategy a key priority for all council departments.
- Request that the Executive Mayor instructs the commission to identify causes and indicators, collect data and ask officers to track new changes from government so that future pressures and demands can be prepared for. Council should collect data and follow journey on how current and new initiatives are having impacts on our tackling poverty strategy.
- Ensure that the commission is asked to look at key indicators such as welfare, unemployment, debt management, council data on rent arrears, housing benefit, household money management education, mental health, substance misuse, in work poverty and education for adults and children.
- Empower council officers through education and training to look at ways to support the priority of rooting out poverty in the borough and be innovative and explore best practises from other councils and partners.
- Ensure that Tower Hamlets council will seek to work with public health, VCS, schools, residents and council to co-produce and influence tackle poverty strategy.

Amendment Proposed by Councillor Maium Talukdar and seconded by Councillor Abdul Wahid

Additions Underlined
Deletions ~~Struck through~~

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- Tower Hamlets unemployment rate is at 6.3% and has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in London disproportionately affecting the BAME population.
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- The 2021 Tower Hamlets Poverty Review found that the primary causes of poverty in our borough are:
 - Joblessness
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 - Rising living costs
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- Pensioner Poverty has risen dramatically since 2014 especially those who live in private rental accommodation.
- It's estimated that residents of Tower Hamlets could have up to £110 million in unclaimed benefits and support.
- The 2023 O&S Review of Food Insecurity in our borough found that in 2023 there had been a rise of £643 to the annual average food shop.
- In work poverty has been on the rise since 2010 with more than 75% of children in poverty in 2023 living in a household where someone is in work.
- Over 60% of families in receipt of tax credits were in work and just under 50% of those in receipt of housing benefit were also in work.
- That 'Tackling the Cost-of-Living Crisis' is a key component of the Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan as well as other anti-poverty measures such as Universal Free School Meals, Education Maintenance Allowance; a generous cost of living package to support residents; and 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- The socio-economic duty, section 1 of the Equality Act (2010) requires public bodies to adopt transparent and effective measures to address the inequalities that result from differences in occupation, education, place of residence or social class.

This council believes:

- That combatting child poverty/ poverty and deprivation should be its most important objective.
- Child poverty is linked to household income – Tower hamlets has the highest income earners (second highest in London) as well as the lowest earners or in unemployment.

- The austerity programme started under the previous government, weakened the social safety net and public services resulting in lower living standards and life expectancy for our residents.
- Brexit, Covid and the cost-of-living crisis added further economic shocks to the national economy and public services.
- Under successive governments there was significant reform of the welfare system with the introduction of Universal Credit, the 'Under-Occupancy Charge' (also known as the bedroom tax), the two-child benefit cap and other measures which have had a detrimental effect on the standard of living for families and individuals in our borough.
- That with political will and co-operation we can end the scourge of child poverty which is ultimately linked to tackling poverty for families in our borough.
- That this can only be achieved through long term planning and consensus building.
- That eradicating poverty is not only morally just, but also a logical way we can deliver best value for our residents.
- That this council should build on the work of successive political administrations and draw together existing work to form a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy with measurable targets and goals.
- That while the Council currently has several mitigations in place to tackle poverty in Tower Hamlets – including the Holiday Activities Fund [HAF]; the Household Support Fund [HSF]; a £1.4million Residents Support Scheme; and the *Accelerate* programme which has a dedicated section to mitigate against and tackle poverty – more can always be done to address the challenges that economic insecurity poses to our residents.
- That any comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to bring together all of the council's directorates, partner orgs (Met Police, Health and Care Partnership, Tower Hamlets Together, Faith Groups etc.) and VSCOs.
- That any strategy must centre the needs and voices of those who have experienced or currently experience poverty.
- That a comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy is complemented by the LBTH Partnership Plan and Strategic Plan.

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- Ensure that these issues are properly reflected in the Equality Impact Assessments undertaken on policies and strategies proposed by the authority.
- Request that the LBTH Overview and Scrutiny Committee, form a special 'Ending Child Poverty' Task and Finish Group that will draw membership from each scrutiny subcommittee to ensure that it's work

is a collegiate and cross-party effort. T&F Group will be responsible for producing a comprehensive report and recommended strategy document to present to the Mayor and Cabinet upon completion. This will support the work of the commission as well as the overall strategy.

- Ensure the strategy is adopted at full council as an overarching policy for the entire council and our partners which should make the strategy a key priority for all council departments.
- Request that the Executive Mayor instructs the commission to identify causes and indicators, collect data and ask officers to track new changes from government so that future pressures and demands can be prepared for. Council should collect data and follow journey on how current and new initiatives are having impacts on our tackling poverty strategy.
- Ensure that the commission is asked to look at key indicators such as welfare, unemployment, debt management, council data on rent arrears, housing benefit, household money management education, mental health, substance misuse, in work poverty and education for adults and children.
- Empower council officers through education and training to look at ways to support the priority of rooting out poverty in the borough and be innovative and explore best practises from other councils and partners.
- Ensure that Tower Hamlets council will seek to work with public health, VCS, schools, residents and council to co-produce and influence tackle poverty strategy.

Following debate, Councillor Asma Islam confirmed that she was accepting both proposed amendments to her motion.

The Council therefore voted on the motion as amended which was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

DECISION

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- That any strategy must centre the needs and voices of those who have experienced or currently experience poverty.
- That a comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy is complemented by the LBTH Partnership Plan and Strategic Plan.

This council resolves to:

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- Request that the Executive Mayor and Chief executive of Tower Hamlets explore the option for the council to begin a tackling poverty commission to produce the anti-poverty strategy.
- Ensure that these issues are properly reflected in the Equality Impact Assessments undertaken on policies and strategies proposed by the authority.
- Request that the LBTH Overview and Scrutiny Committee, form a special 'Ending Child Poverty' Task and Finish Group that will draw membership from each scrutiny subcommittee to ensure that it's work is a collegiate and cross-party effort. T&F Group will be responsible for producing a comprehensive report and recommended strategy document to present to the Mayor and Cabinet upon completion. This will support the work of the commission as well as the overall strategy.
- Ensure the strategy is adopted at full council as an overarching policy for the entire council and our partners which should make the strategy a key priority for all council departments.
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- Ensure that the commission is asked to look at key indicators such as welfare, unemployment, debt management, council data on rent arrears, housing benefit, household money management education, mental health, substance misuse, in work poverty and education for adults and children.
- Empower council officers through education and training to look at ways to support the priority of rooting out poverty in the borough and be innovative and explore best practises from other councils and partners.
- Ensure that Tower Hamlets council will seek to work with public health, VCS, schools, residents and council to co-produce and influence tackle poverty strategy.

(Action by: Robin Beattie, Director for Strategy, Transformation and Improvement)

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

9.1 Market Designation (Columbia Road, Watney, Whitechapel)

Councillor Shafi Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency **moved** the report on Market Designation (Columbia Road, Watney and Whitechapel). Councillor Kamrul Hussain **seconded** the report.

Councillor Ahmed said Cabinet had considered the report on the 10th July 2024 and he was asking Council to approve the recommendations within the report. Members added their comments.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Note the report; and
2. Agreed to the market improvements as set out in the Cabinet report for Columbia Road Market, Watney Market and Whitechapel Market subject to Officers re-examining the suggestion put forward by members in relation to pitches for Columbia Road Market.

9.2 Market & Street Trading Fees & Charges 2024/25

Councillor Shafi Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency **moved** the report on Market and Street Fees & Charges 2024/25. Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury **seconded** the report.

Councillor Ahmed said Cabinet had considered the report on the 10th July 2024 and he was asking Council to approve the recommendations within the report. Members added their comments.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Note the consultation response; and
2. Agreed to the Option 2 set out in the report, namely to increase the street traders and market fees by 3.1% from September 2024.

10. OTHER BUSINESS**10.1 London Legacy Development Corporation - Interim Delegation Schemes**

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding **moved** the report and Councillor Amin Rahman **seconded** the report.

Members of the Council commented on the report.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Enter into the first Interim Delegation Scheme with the London Legacy Development Corporation (under Section 203 of the Localism Act) to perform planning functions on behalf of LLDC limited to determining planning applications on their behalf, as submitted from the 1 September 2024 to 30 November 2024 or until planning powers are formally transferred through legislation.
2. Enter into the second Interim Delegation Scheme with the London Legacy Development Corporation (under Section 203 of the Localism Act) to perform all planning functions on their behalf from 1 December 2024 until planning powers are formally transferred through legislation.

10.2 Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023/24

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning **moved** the report. Councillor Bodrul Choudhury **seconded** the report.

Members of the Council commented on the report.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Note the contents of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

10.3 Proportionality and Allocation of Places on Committees of the Council 2024/25

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning **moved** the report. Councillor Bodrul Choudhury **seconded** the report. Council also considered the tabled nomination of Councillor Sabina Akhtar to fill the ungrouped committee vacancy on the Licensing Committee.

Members of the Council commented on the report.

DECISION

Council **AGREED** to:

1. Consider the review of proportionality as at Section 3 of this report and the allocation of seats on Committees and Sub-Committees for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2024/25 as set out at paragraph 3.6.
2. Note the Committees set out for the municipal year 2024/25 listed in paragraph 3.6 as agreed at the Annual Council meeting held on Wednesday 15 May 2024.
3. Agree the appointment of Cllr Sabina Akhtar to the vacant ungrouped position on the Licensing Committee.
4. To agree that the Monitoring Officer is delegated to approve the appointment of Councillors required to fill positions during the municipal year in line with the proportionality arrangements set out in this report on the nomination of the respective group leaders.
5. Agree that the Monitoring Officer be delegated to approve the appointment of ungrouped Councillors to any committee places not allocated by the Council to a political group, after consultation with those Councillors and the Speaker of the Council where there is only one application for the position (where there is more than one application these will be presented to Council for decision).

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 Amin Rahman regarding the Council's accounts. A supplemental question was asked.

11.2 Question from Councillor Mufedah Bustin about income generated from the Island's parks. A supplemental question was asked.

Questions 11.3 to 11.24 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

There were no additional motions submitted for Council to consider.

The meeting ended at 10.03 p.m.