

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.34 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Jahed Choudhury	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Resources
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Children and Education
Councillor Bellal Uddin	Scrutiny Lead for Adults and Health Services
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Amy Lee	
Councillor James King	
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait	Scrutiny Lead for Environment and the Climate Emergency

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Amina Ali

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Shafi Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency)
Councillor Abdul Wahid	(Cabinet Member for Customer Service, Equalities and Social Inclusion)

Co-optees Present in Person:

Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Julie Lorraine	(Corporate Director for Resources, Deputy Chief Executive)
Abdulrazak Kassim	(Director of Finance)
Chris Leslie	(Head of Strategic & Corporate Finance)
Ashraf Ali	(Director for Public Realm)
Leah Sykes	(Director Of Customer Services)
Filuck Miah	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Usman Zia (Head Of Information Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Jahed Ahmed. Councillor Amina Ali and Halima Islam joined the meeting online.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

Apologies were received from Jahed Ahmed. Councillor Amina Ali and Halima Islam joined the meeting online.

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 9 and 23 July 2024 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the action log.

5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

6. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

7. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Budget Monitoring 2024/25 Q1

Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources and Chief Executive, presented the Q1 Budget Monitoring 2024/25 report with Abdulrazak Kassim, Director of Finance, Chris Leslie, Head of Strategic & Corporate Finance and Cllr Shafi Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- The revenue and benefit office has a significant income, how is this allocated across the council? Officers stated that a large amount of this

income comes from the Department of Work and Pensions, to be allocated to residents receiving financial support.

- There are concerns about Budget Slippage across this report in education, including areas like the Institute of Academic of Excellence. Will there be any evaluation of any projects? Is now the time to look at how education funding is distributed across the borough? Officers detailed what the costs have been, including change of use of the original building. The amount that has been allocated to this has been decreased, but the slippage in the budget has been due to areas outside the of the council's control.
- What confidence do officers have within the savings targets? Officers detailed on the measures needed to have high confidence in savings targets, including when the council will see the return on the funding within the financial year.
- The Chief Executive Office Directorate is currently forecasting an overspend, including large pressures on Legal Services? Can officers clarify why reserve money has been drawn into this Directorate? Officers stated that a lot of the pressures in legal services is on recruitment and agency workers on difficult to fill posts. The Council needs to ensure that full time staff are permanently recruited to save in this area. Officers detailed that reserves have been budgeted to fund services in this directorate, away from the general fund, this was seen as the best source of funding when drafting the council budget.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

8. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

8.1 Business Rates Risks

Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources and Chief Executive and Chris Leslie, Head of Strategic & Corporate Finance presented an overview of the Business Rates Risk (BRR) and includes how its charged, collected and distributed, appeals, ratings lists, historical rate reduction levels, risks and mitigations.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- How is a risk assessed as a risk and has any potential risk being factored into to future budgeting? Officers detailed how this budgeting has been built up with smoothing reserves, which as been protected and set aside. This has benefited the council for 2024/25, but the council will need to build back these reserves in the coming years.
- What are the grounds for business rate appeals? How can the council mitigate against this? Officers detailed that appeals will often spiral, after a president has been set. Appeals are handled independently of the council, and often the council is not consulted for evidence for the appeals.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the presentation.

8.2 Transport Strategy

Cllr Shafi Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency provided the committee with an update on the work undertaken to date to refresh the 2019 Tower Hamlets Transport Strategy, with Ashraf Ali, Director for Public Realm.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Safety for Women and Girls while traveling in the borough, must be throughout this strategy.
- With the greater roll out of electric vehicle charging points, can officers confirm that these will be accessible to all residents? Officers confirmed the roll out of different types of charging models, that will be for a range of needs. There is no traffic order in place for parking bays to be separated for electric vehicles, so all residents will still be able to park, to not limit car parking access.
- The council has made progress on residents with mobility issues, but the still has a long way to go. What work is being considered by the council to deal with pavement issues? Will the council be engaging with stakeholders to ensure the strategy will be strong on accessibility? Officers stated that work has been done to assess the roads across the borough, highlighting areas where capital works can be done to ensure they are up to standard.
- How will the strategy support residents with land that is not public but has access issues? Officers stated while there is no scope to perform capital improvements, the council will be working with RSOs to share best practice and work together to see improvements.
- Ensuring that the strategy can deal with modern cycle hire schemes that has seen residents raise concerns. Illegal batteries for electric vehicles are also a growing concern. Cllr Shafi Ahmed stated that the council works with the GLA and other London wide organisations to deal with known issues with cycle hire schemes. Officers highlighted that there is a lack of helpful legislation to deal with this issue. But working with trading standard officers to ensure that only legal electric batteries are being sold and working with partners like delivery groups to raise awareness of dangers.
- Cycling needs better infrastructure to ensure safety for cyclists and pedestrians. Officers highlighted how infrastructure can be better implemented so it is clearer and shared spaces can be better used. Working with schools and community groups to ensure that policy understanding is better understood will help build in awareness as well.
- Members raised concerns about how a transport strategy with cycling schemes and other safety initiatives can be implemented while the administration has been elected under promises that are critical of

these schemes. Cllr Shafi Ahmed stated that there is a current Judicial review on the liveable streets work, but the council has received funding to implement tree planting and other green measures within the borough.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the update.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN FINAL DECISION AND SERVICE ACTION PLAN RESPONSE

Cllr Abdul Wahid, Cabinet Member for Customer Service, Equalities and Social Inclusion, with Usman Zia, Head Of Information Governance and Leah Sykes, Director Of Customer Services presented an overview of Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Final Decision and Service Action Plan Response including a draft of the reasonable adjustment policy.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- How will the council be continuing to work with the stakeholders who helped shape the action plan? Officers confirmed that as the action plan continues, there will be more consultation with partners and a reasonable adjustment policy will be shared.
- How will the council ensure our services continue to have an offline, face to face presence? Officers stated that the council is working to be more consistent in ensuring that services have engagement that makes sense, so if there should be a phone option, it will have it, along with face to face and making use of online options.
- It is helpful that the council is recognising that this is an authority wide issue, but instead of taking issues case to case, how do we ensure that this is enforced across the council? Officers confirmed that the council will be implementing tracking on improvements to ensure change is seen and felt across the council.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the decision and action plan.

10. FINAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25

The chair introduced the final draft of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024-25, seeking feedback from the committee before it is actioned by officers.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Members raised concerns that the Mayor is only scheduled to attend the committee once for a spotlight item, where members can raise questions on any issue. Officers confirmed that while there is only one

instance of this item, the Mayor is invited to attend on a number of items to be scrutinised across the year.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024-25.

11. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

RESOLVED:

Members agreed the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24.

12. SCRUTINY LEADS UPDATES

Nil items.

13. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Members agreed to asked questions on Cabinet Item 6.3 Time Banded Collections (Waste Services)

14. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

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

Nil Items.

16. 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

17. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

18. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Jahed Choudhury
Overview & Scrutiny Committee