

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 18:34 ON TUESDAY, 21 MAY 2024
COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Jahed Choudhury
Councillor Suluk Ahmed
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury
Councillor Ahmodur Khan
Councillor Abdul Mannan
Councillor Bellal Uddin
Councillor Sabina Akhtar
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Amy Lee
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman

Co-optees Present in Person:

Halima Islam
Jahed Ahmed

Officers Present in Person:

Stephen Halsey	(Chief Executive)
Julie Lorraine	(Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director for Resources)
Robin Beattie	(Director of Strategy, Transformation & Improvement)
Matthew Mannion	(Head of Democratic Services)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Lead)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received from members.

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 22 April 2024 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2024-2025

Cllr Bodrul Choudhury was elected Vice Chair.

5. MAYOR'S SPOTLIGHT

The Mayor gave a presentation on the Council's year end delivery and presented the priorities for 2024-25, with Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive and Julie Lorraine, Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director for Resources.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- What will the governance be for Tower Hamlets Homes? Will there be any instability within the insourcing? The Mayor confirmed that he is pleased with the officer planning around the insourcing, to allow for minimal instability in the service. Officers confirmed that senior management from Tower Hamlets Homes did not join the council in the transition and there will be a management restructure. The insourcing will improve housing within the borough, including homelessness.
- Customer service is at the heart of how the council deals with residents. How do you feel the council has grown in this area and what can be improved? The Mayor stated that the customer journey is still not where it should be. But plans have been put in place to ensure that residents will see improvement.
- What plans are being put in place to deal with homelessness in the borough? The Mayor stated the current homelessness prevention plan, including two different grants to help and support residents and families. Additional funding has been placed to invest in additional front line staff to help with housing issues. The council is currently acquiring homes, 100s per year, which will help with finding places for residents to live. Officers detailed the funding that is available, which amount to £6.35M in support for residents.

- Will the council be opening a serious case review, based on a recent family court case, which saw patterns of serious domestic abuse? The Mayor stated that the case will be reviewed and the council will do everything necessary to see improvement in this area.
- What are the key challenges the council is facing and what is the council doing to tackle these challenges? The Mayor reflected on various issues affecting the council, like adult social care, and tackling homelessness and funding for youth services. But if the council works to its savings plan, it can deliver on the services that residents need.
- Recycling and waste collections are not where they should be, what is the council doing to address this? The Mayor highlighted the current investment in waste collection. Officers detailed investment of £5M of a work program to address recycling and waste issues in the borough.
- What are the current plans to ensure that council becomes a council of sanctuary. The Mayor stated that council will be actioning this work as soon as possible and its important to become a council of sanctuary.
- Can the committee be given an update on the recent housing options protests and what the council has done to meet with them and action concerns raised. Officers confirmed that the group has been met with and updates will be sent to committee as casework has been resolved.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the presentation.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Establishment of Scrutiny Lead Members, Sub-Committees and Appointment of Members 2024/25

Matthew Mannion Head of Democratic Services presented the Establishment of Scrutiny Lead Members, Sub-Committees and Appointment of Members 2024/25.

Councillor Bellal Uddin was elected Scrutiny Lead for Adults and Health Services (including Chairing the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee)

Councillor Abdul Mannan was elected Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education (including Chairing the Children & Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee).

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury was elected Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration (including Chairing the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee).

Councillor Amhadour Rahman was elected Scrutiny Lead for Resources

Councillor Suluk Ahmed was elected Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety

Members of the committee agreed to add a new scrutiny lead portfolio. Councillor Nathalie Bienfiet was elected Environment and the Climate Emergency.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed to the recommendations within the report.

7. REVISED STATUTORY GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILS ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities, presented Revised statutory guidance for councils on Overview and Scrutiny.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Members expressed interest for scrutiny leads to hold events with residents to engage on a range of issues.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the updated guidance within the report.

8. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

9. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the action log.

10. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items

11. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Nil items

12. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

13. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items

14. ATTENDANCE OF SCRUTINY CO-OPTEEES 2023/24

Thomas French, Democratic Services Officer presented the attendance statistics for co-opted members of the Committee in the previous municipal year.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Members stated that co-opted members need support from officers to attend meetings, if they have expressed any barriers to attending meetings.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed for officers to put support in place for co-opted members and report back to committee.

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

The Chair allowed Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive, with Robin Beattie, Director of Strategy, Transformation & Improvement, to present a report Improving the Council's Scrutiny Function, that was presented at the 16 May 2024 Cabinet Meeting.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Members expressed concern that the Chief Executive would take a report on Scrutiny to Cabinet, without consulting members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members should have fed into this report before it was placed on the cabinet agenda. Officers stated that the report for cabinet was only for noting and no actions have been agreed, committee is now able to discuss the actions within the report.
- Members expressed concerns that a lot of the content of the report is very top down in what is proposed and has not been sourced from members and residents.
- Members asked for clarification on the amount of call ins received by committee and if it is more than under the previous administration.
- As housing is a complex issue within the borough, will the council allow more recourse to the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee? Officers agreed that the work of the sub-committee needs additional resource and officers will engage with sub-committee members on how this should be deployed.
- Will an opposition members be invited to chair committees like Overview and Scrutiny Committee? Officers confirmed that while chairing has been considered, there does not appear to be any other council that does practice this chairing. It is important that changes add value, rather than more opportunities to be more political. This will continue to be reviewed.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

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 20:42

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee