

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 18:05 ON TUESDAY, 18 JUNE 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 Sabina Akhtar	
Councillor Amina Ali	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Amy Lee	
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait	Scrutiny Lead for Environment and the Climate Emergency

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Kamrul Hussain	Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation
Councillor Kabir Ahmed	Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Jahur Ali	(Director of Culture)
Catherine Boyd	(Head Of Arts Parks & Events)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Lead)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Afazul Hoque (Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

Councillor's Islam, Ali and Bienfait declared non-disclosable pecuniary interest in item 3.1

3. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

3.1 Victoria Park Licence to Occupy

The Chair welcomed residents from the Victoria Park Friends to make a verbal presentation to the committee, highlighting the lack of meaningful consultation around the large events and the importance of the park for the community.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- What would meaningful consultation mean to residents? Residents felt currently, finding out about licensing is seeing a notice pinned up on a fence, so improving on this would be a great start. Engaging with park uses and residents to understand the impact large scale projects would help and stating mitigations that have been put in place.
- The council plans to put in place community days within the park, how effective will this be? Residents stated that the council has run these events in the past with commercial partners, which has seen success, including increased event infrastructure for the bandstand and allowing residents to bring their own food and drink to community events. However increased commercial events in the park will have a huge impact on residents without their own gardens who need access to green space, which community days will not be supportive enough of.
- The council sent out over 1500 consultation letters to residents about the large events planned in the park, but only received around 3 back, what is the resident view on this? Was it made clear that the council will generate a lot of revenue to fund council services? This is along with online advertisement as well. Residents detailed that as the council has been running events for so long in the park, not many residents would just respond to these letters without incentive, however residents do feel the increased events will have an impact. While it will generate revenue, this is not the primary purpose of the park, which is for public recreation.
- Where residents aware of the possibility of the contract being extended? Residents confirmed that they were aware of the extension, but they thought it would go out to public tender instead.
- As only a small part of the park will be used by the large events, do residents not see any benefits to the park being used in this way? Residents corrected the statement, saying it is around 40 per cent of the usable area will be taken up by events. There are of course

benefits, many residents are looking forward to events, but as many residents rely on the park, the benefits do come at a cost to residents in social housing who rely on the park.

Cllr Marc Francis presented the reasons for call-in on behalf of the Call-in members and proposed alternative course of action as set out in the report.

Cllr Marc Francis questioned comments made by Cllr Bodrul Choudhury about 1500 consultation letters being sent out to residents, from the council, when it does not appear this was the case.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- As a local councillor, why do you feel this decision should be sent back to the Mayor? Cllr Francis stated no resident is against events in Victoria Park, however the level of events will be incredibly disruptive to residents. While some residents plan holidays around these events, the majority of residents have to endure this disruption and their access to the park limited. As the events are due to increase, the distribution will only worsen.
- Do you feel these events will make the borough more of a “go to” area for visitors? Cllr Francis disagreed, stated the borough is already a go to area for visitors. The events have been a success in the past, but it has been overstated just how much financial gain residents will see out of these increased events.
- There have been many complaints made around the previous events made from residents. Do you think the council is going in the right direction, as it will raise a lot of money for the council? Cllr Francis stated that the financial actions of the current administration has led to the amount of events being raised in the park. But what did the event partners do with these complaints, what was resolved? Many residents have had to put up with issues for years. If the Mayor thought this was a strong decision, he would have run a consultation to see the positive feedback.

Cllr Kamrul Hussain, Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation, with Cllr Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding for and Jahur Ali, Director of Culture, Catherine Boyd, Head Of Arts Parks & Events, set out the context of the Cabinet Decision and reviewed the key elements of the decision.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Members stated concern that Cllr Kabir Ahmed, who was not the lead member at the time of the decision or at the time of this committee meeting, has been allowed to speak on the decision, on behalf of the Mayor.
- Victoria Park is an asset, what discussion was had with commercial partners to get the most out of the park? Officers stated that while a lot of discussions are commercially sensitive, but funds have been put aside to allow for environmental impact work and investment in the park.

- Why did the council decide not to hold engagement with the public? Why did the council not negotiate with commercial partners to engage with residents? Cllr Kabir Ahmed detailed that there have been some forms of consultation, but a lot of the discussions of the contract have of course been away from residents.
- How has the council listened to resident concerns with the events? Cllr Kamrul Hussain detailed what commercial partners must demonstrate in order to run events in Victoria Park, and the continuing meeting that will happen across the contract.
- What have commercial partners offered residents and local businesses? Cllr Kamrul Hussain highlighted the free community events that will be held in Victoria Park.
- What was the actual engagement with residents that has been carried out? As there have been a lot of numbers of letters stated in the meeting so far? Officers detailed the 1500 letters were delivered by the Licensing Authority during the licensing process. There will be continued engagement throughout the length of the contract.
- How does the lead member feel about the lack of the consultation to residents around these events? Cllr Kamrul Hussain stated that he feels confident around the process and is happy that the events will ensure the council will not end up like local authorities around the country, who are struggling financially.
- Can the lead member and officers speak to the council control over the events contract will it be monitored and is there a break clause? Officers confirmed the process around monitoring the contract, including noise levels and liaising with health and safety for events. Complaints will be logged and monitored, working with colleagues in environmental health. The contract includes a guaranteed fee, even if events do not go ahead, for whatever reason, but unless the contract is breached, there is no break clause.
- The lead member should confirm he will be working with residents around Victoria Park, to engage with their concerns.

After hearing from the Call-in Members, Lead Member and officers, the Committee considered the reasons for the Call-in and discussed if the committee should take further action.

DECISION

The Committee **RESOLVED** that no further action would be taken on the call in.

The meeting ended at 19:56

Chair, Councillor Jahed Choudhury
Overview & Scrutiny Committee