


Non-Executive Report of the: Council 20 th November 2024	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Linda Walker, Interim Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer	Classification: Unrestricted
Petitions to Council	

Originating Officer(s)	Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services
Wards affected	All wards

SUMMARY

1. This report sets out details of the valid petitions submitted for presentation and debate at this Council meeting. The text of the petitions received are set out in the attached report.
2. The Council's Constitution provides for up to four petitions to be heard at each ordinary Council meeting. These are taken in order of receipt, except those petitions for debate (in excess of 2,000 signatures) will take precedence. Should more than four petitions be received, all remaining petitions will be listed to be formally noted by Council.
 - a. There is one petition to be debated:
 - Reject or significantly reduce proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) against dogs
 - b. There are two heard.
 - Issue with the dock side path on the Isle of Dogs
 - Social Housing

PETITIONS TO BE HEARD

3. For Petitions listed as to be heard:
 - a. Petitioners may address the meeting for no more than 3 minutes.
 - b. Members may then question the petitioners for a further 4 minutes.
 - c. Finally, the speaker will invite the Mayor or (at the Mayor's discretion) the relevant Lead Member or Committee Chair to respond to the petition for up to 2 minutes. The petition will then be referred to the relevant Corporate Director for attention who will provide a written response within 28 days of the date of the meeting.
4. Members, other than a Cabinet Member or Committee Chair responding at the end of the item, should confine their contributions to questions and not make statements or attempt to debate.
5. Responses to all petitions will be sent to the lead petitioner and displayed on the Council's website.

PETITION TO BE DEBATED

6. The standard format for a Petition for Debate is as follows.
 - The petitioners to present their petition for a maximum of three minutes.
 - Questions and answers for four minutes.
 - Debate for 15 minutes. All speeches are limited to a maximum of three minutes
 - The Speaker will invite the Mayor or (at the Mayor's discretion) a Cabinet Member to respond to the matters raised
 - If no motion is moved during the debate, the petition will stand referred to the relevant Corporate Director for a written response.
 - If a motion is moved during the debate, the motion will be put to the vote. The petition will stand referred to the relevant Corporate Director for a written response.

Motions on the Petition

7. During their speech any Member may move a motion for the Council's consideration relevant to matters in the petition (this does not require the suspension of standing orders). It is requested that Motions relating to the petition be submitted to

Linda Walker, Interim Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting to allow full circulation.

8. Following the petition debate, any motions moved will be put to the vote.
9. In relation to executive functions, the Council does not have powers to override any executive decision of the Mayor or substitute its own decision. The Council may however pass a motion expressing a view on the matter or referring the matter to the Mayor, calling on him to take some action, or consider or reconsider a decision, with recommendations to inform that consideration. Officers will advise on the constitutional validity of any motion that may be moved

Petition to be debated

5.1 Reject or significantly reduce proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) against dogs

Statement:

We the undersigned petition the council to To The Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Tower Hamlets Borough Council, and relevant stakeholders We, the undersigned, are residents, dog owners, dog walkers, and concerned citizens who oppose the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Tower Hamlets. This order includes two key measures that we believe are detrimental to the well-being of our community and our canine companions: Mandatory Leashing of Dogs at All Times in Public Spaces Restriction on the Number of Dogs a Dog Walker Can Handle Reasons for Our Opposition

Justification:

Mandatory Leashing of Dogs at All Times in Public Spaces:

Impact on Dogs' Well-being: Dogs need regular exercise and socialization for their physical and mental health. Allowing dogs to run freely in designated areas is essential for their development and happiness. Continuous leashing can lead to increased anxiety and behavioral problems in dogs.

Loss of Community Spirit: Many local parks and green spaces in Tower Hamlets serve as social hubs for dog owners. These spaces provide opportunities for community bonding and mutual support among residents. Enforcing leashing at all times would disrupt this community dynamic and limit social interactions.

Existing Regulations on Dangerous Dogs: Current legislation, such as the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and other local by-laws, already provides sufficient measures to address issues with dangerous or poorly behaved dogs. These laws ensure that any dog exhibiting aggressive behaviour can be controlled and, if necessary, removed from public spaces. Implementing a blanket leash requirement is an excessive measure that penalises all dog owners rather than targeting the problematic few.

Overcrowding of Designated Unleashed Areas: Requiring all dogs to be on leads in public spaces will likely lead to overcrowding in the limited designated off-leash areas. This can cause stress and potential conflict among dogs that are used to having more space to run and play. Overcrowded conditions can increase the risk of accidents and altercations between dogs, counteracting the intended safety benefits of the PSPO.

2. Restriction on the Number of Dogs a Dog Walker Can Handle:

Professional Impact: Many professional dog walkers rely on their ability to walk multiple dogs to sustain their businesses. Restricting the number of dogs

they can walk will negatively impact their livelihoods and could lead to increased costs for dog owners.

Safety and Responsibility: Professional dog walkers are trained to manage multiple dogs effectively and safely. Arbitrary restrictions do not account for the skills and experience of individual dog walkers. Instead, regulations should focus on ensuring professional standards and proper training.

Unintended Consequences: Limiting the number of dogs per walker could lead to more frequent and unnecessary car journeys to transport dogs to and from different locations, increasing traffic and environmental impact.

General points

Better Use of Enforcement Resources

Tower Hamlets faces significant challenges with violent crime, including knife crime and muggings. We believe that enforcement resources would be better utilized in tackling these serious issues that pose a direct threat to the safety of all residents. Redirecting resources to address violent crime would have a more meaningful impact on community safety than enforcing restrictions on dog walking.

Historical Tradition of Dog-Friendliness in the UK

The United Kingdom has a long-standing tradition of being a dog-friendly country. For centuries, dogs have been cherished companions and valued members of British households. The UK's parks, green spaces, and countryside have historically been places where dogs can run freely, socialise, and exercise. This tradition of dog-friendliness is an integral part of our cultural heritage and community life. Restrictive measures such as those proposed in the PSPO undermine this cherished tradition. Instead of enhancing community well-being, they threaten to erode the harmonious coexistence between dog owners and non-dog owners that has been a hallmark of British society.

Economic Impact on the Community

The proposed restrictions would not only affect dog owners and walkers but also have broader economic implications. Professional dog walking services contribute significantly to the local economy, providing employment and supporting small businesses. Limiting the number of dogs a walker can handle will likely result in higher costs for dog owners, decreased demand for services, and potential job losses within this sector.

Alternative recommendation - Promoting Responsible Dog Ownership Through Education

Rather than imposing restrictive measures, we advocate for promoting responsible dog ownership through education and community engagement. Educational programs can effectively address concerns about dog behavior and safety by:

- Raising awareness about existing regulations and the importance of adhering to them.
- Providing training for dog owners on how to manage their pets responsibly in public spaces.
- Encouraging the use of existing community resources, such as local dog training schools, to improve dog behaviour and owner responsibility.

By fostering a culture of responsible dog ownership, we can address concerns about safety and behaviour without resorting to punitive measures that affect the entire community.

Our Request

We respectfully request that the Tower Hamlets Borough Council reconsider these aspects of the PSPO. Existing regulations already address concerns about dog behaviour and safety. Instead of imposing new restrictive measures, we urge the council to enforce current laws more effectively.

By focusing on the enforcement of existing regulations, promoting responsible dog ownership through education, and redirecting resources to tackle violent crime, we can ensure that our community remains safe and dog-friendly.

We urge the Tower Hamlets Borough Council to engage in an open dialogue with the community to find a fair and effective solution that reflects the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

Petitions to be heard:

5.2 Issue with the dock side path on the Isle of Dogs

We call on the Council to meet Canal and River Trust and to discuss how they can work together and how the Council can support the area. To look at:

- Place Council bins in dockside areas with high footfall
- To include the dock side path in Council street cleaning routes
- To spend S106/CIL/NHB money on fixing the path
- To help CRT install lifebuoys that can be easily accessed in an emergency, but which discourage misuse
- To investigate whether Canal & River Trust will be able to maintain the docks, pumping station and bridges for the next few decades

And to install Council CCTV cameras in key locations to ensure public safety in an area that has seen increasing crime

Plus anything else that Canal & River Trust, the Council, Councillors and residents think appropriate.

This is to ensure that they are properly looked after and maintained for resident's use. They form one of the most important areas of publicly accessible land in the fastest growing and densest place in the UK. But they have been spoiled by rubbish and other problems which the Council can help fix.

The dockside path has declined in quality over the last few years. because:

- Waste bins have been removed so there is nowhere to leave rubbish
- Areas are not being cleaned regularly so rubbish builds up
- Rubbish also ends up in the water which makes the whole area look dirty and is also an issue for the birds and fish
- Tree roots are making paths uneven creating trip hazards and causing accidents
- There are no Council CCTV cameras to help ensure security
- Some lifebuoys are missing
- In addition the delays to the new south dock bridge is putting more pressure on the Wilkinson Eyre South Quay footbridge

Most of the dockside path and the bridge is the responsibility of the Canal & River Trust, a national charity, responsible for the upkeep of the docks but it has seen its budget cut in recent years. Its only source of local income is from boat mooring fees which have not grown much in recent years compared to the number of people now using the land they own (which used to be publicly owned land).

This is an odd arrangement, a national organisation responsible for the waterways mainly for boat use is paying to look after land, the dockside path, that is mainly used by Tower Hamlets residents, who pay their Council to look after local areas.

The result is that important parts of the area are declining in quality at a time when the Council wants private buyers and investors to invest enormous sums in new build apartments close to the path.

The Isle of Dogs has generated enormous sums of money for Tower Hamlets Council in new Council tax, New Homes Bonus, S106 and CIL money. It's time some of that was used to benefit the local area.

In addition many local assets critical to the area (the Westferry pumping station, the locks, the Wilkinson Eyre bridge, Pepper Street bridge and the Blue bridge) are also owned and maintained by Canal & River Trust.

In Newham by contrast the Royal Docks are managed by a consortium of central government, the GLA and a local business.

If the Council wants new development in this area, then it needs to get more involved in ensuring the area looks good, is safe, and welcoming. Why should people invest money in an area that looks run down?

5.3 Petition: Mr Terry McGreenera (The Housing Times)

Statement:

We the undersigned petition Tower Hamlets Council to provide more Social Housing for residents.