

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2022

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed (Chair)
Councillor Maisha Begum (Member)
Councillor Marc Francis (Member)
Councillor Asma Islam (Member)
Councillor Ahmodur Khan (Member)
Councillor Sabina Khan (Member)

Jahid Ahmed (Co-Optee) (Co-optee)
Halima Islam (Co-Optee) Scrutiny Co-Optee

Other Members Present:

Councillor Saied Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)

Officers Present:

Stephen Bramah (Corporate Head of Strategy and Improvement)
Daniel Kerr (Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Thomas French (Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers Present, virtually:

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive)
Nisar Visram (Director of Finance Audit and Procurement)

**1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND
OTHER INTERESTS**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting.

2. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

Minutes will be presented at future meeting of the committee.

3. CABINETS REPORTS FOR SCRUTINY

3.1 Strategic Performance Monitoring Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting Q1 & Q2 2022/23

The committee considered the report on Strategic Performance Monitoring Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting Q1 & Q2 2022/23 presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed and Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, and Stephen Bramah, Corporate Head of Strategy and Improvement.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- The Mayor's Energy Fund for the cost-of-living crisis, how is this funded and will it be seeking funding from government grants? Is it correct to call this a Mayor's Fund, when it seems to be funded by the Government? Cllr Saied Ahmed confirmed that the fund has come from across different pots of money. The name of the fund is less concerning than what support is given out to the residents. Will Tuckley stated that the fund has been topped up from council funding, along with the funds from central government. However, the council is trying to support residents while we wait for the government to announce all the resources that they will provide to help during the energy crisis.
- The reporting on the performance of refuse and recycling collections is seen to be very low, can this be explained? These figures do not reflect the true picture of the issue the borough is going through with our waste collection. Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that the Mayor has called a waste emergency and is currently being taken very seriously, with the aim to improve this service to compete with other boroughs on their waste performance. Stephen Bramah confirmed that the Q2 data will be following later in the month, as it was not ready for reporting. Will Tuckley confirmed that the council is not happy with the waste performance and the council is reacting to a borough that has got denser and busier, which has been impacted further by the affects of Covid-19. But the council will be looking at ways to improve this, it is a key priority for the council. The work of bringing services in house will have an improvement on performance.
- The percentage of victims of violence against women and girls who feel safer, is lower in Q2, can this be explained? With the administration lacking representation of the marginalised groups who use these services, what will the council be doing to build confidence in victims coming forward? Stephen Bramah explained that the data collection could be better, reflecting more on those using the service. Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that more work is needed to be done, and the council is committed to improving this vital service. The council works with women across services and will work with specialists to ensure that this issue in the borough is supported correctly.
- What is the council doing to ensure the top earners in the council are from diverse backgrounds? Do you feel the current target is ambitious enough? Will Tuckley stated that a lot of measures are needed to ensure that colleagues are able to step up and gain these positions, as

a lot of our staff are from diverse backgrounds and should be able to gain the experience needed to step in more senior roles.

- Members asked to see a copy of the action plan on waste and for a breakdown of the costing around the Mayor's Energy Fund.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

3.2 Strategic Performance Monitoring P6 Budget Monitoring Report

The committee considered the report on Budget Monitoring Report presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed and Nisar Visram, Director of Finance Audit and Procurement.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- How sustainable is the policy when the reserves are gone? What are the key drivers to explain the overspend? Nisar Visram explained how the funding has been applied this year, but Adult Social Care has been an overspend. But future budgeting around this will take this into account, along with additional funding, year on year.
- The reporting on employment skills is very thin, more detail is needed to explain the expense. Nisar Visram agreed to investigate this area for the committee and see if this can be reported on at future meetings.
- On the extra funding for staffing on the Mayor's office, can this expenditure be justified? Could the spending not be put into areas like customer service? Nisar Visram explained how this will be funded, including initially from reserves, then from the medium-term budget. Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that the Mayor's office staffing is an important part of improving the borough, making it more open to ensure that residents are able to meet with, and engage with the Mayor.
- The repairs & maintenance budget is forecasting a favourable variance; however, this does seem to have an impact on tenants and leaseholders who will be paying for repairs? What is the impact of Gill Street not progressing? Can these projects not be funded from reserves? Nisar Visram explained the pressures that have been found and what impact this has had on the revenue budget. Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that building homes was a priority of this council, but the committee would need to wait and see what these projects turn out to be.
- What is the progress on the councils plans to build more homes? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated the current plans on home building, like meeting with new developers.

RESOLVED

The report was noted.

3.3 Budget Fees and Charges report

Item was withdrawn.

4. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members Noted the forward plan.

5. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Members Noted the Cabinet Papers and did not wish to raise any questions.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

Members Noted the Report

7. ACTION NOTE

RESOLVED:

Members Noted the Report

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

The chair invited the Scrutiny Leads to give the committee updates:

- Cllr Sabina Khan, Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance, reported on the recent scrutiny review and gave the following highlights. The need to focus on the cost-of-living crisis and the impact on food poverty. The review should be looking at those who are struggling with council tax and suggesting relaxed terms for repayment. A range of support needs to be offered to those who visit food banks and on prepaid energy meters.

9. 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

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

Nil items.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mannan and Choudhury.

The meeting ended at 19:58

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee