

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2023**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,  
LONDON, E14 2BG**

**Members Present in Person:**

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children's and Education
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Sabina Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance (To Be Confirmed)
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety

**Other Councillors Present in Person:**

Cllr Maium Talukdar	(Deputy Mayor)
Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)

**Co-optees Present in Person:**

Jahid Ahmed  
Halima Islam

**Officers Present in Person:**

Sharon Godman	(Director strategy, improvement and transformation)
Daniel Kerr	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Nisar Visram	(Director of Finance Audit and Procurement)
Frances Winter	(Strategy & Improvement Lead)
Abidah Kamali	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS**

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

## **3. CABINETS REPORTS FOR SCRUTINY**

### **3.1 TOWER HAMLETS PARTNERSHIP PLAN**

The Tower Hamlets Partnership Plan was presented by Cllr Maium Talukdar, Frances Winter, Strategy & Improvement Lead and Abidah Kamali, Senior Strategy and Policy Officer.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- What lessons have been learned from the previous plan and how did that inform the new plan? Officers detailed how they worked with the feedback from the last plan, including the partnership working around the community response to Covid-19.
- Members discussed the opportunities and challenges that partners can bring:
  - Partners and stakeholders should be signing up to Tower Hamlets values and priorities, rather than driving down standards, particularly when working with partners in housing.
  - How do we hold partners accountable in housing?
  - How much power does the council have to ensure partners are holding up the council's standards?
  - Accessibility and language is very important for ensuring our residents can engage in a way that they understand the service.
  - Obesity is an issue within the borough, what can we do to work with our partners to deal with this issue?
  - Community wellbeing and cohesion should be a long term aim of the new plan. There needs to be a victim focus when the council looks at crime.
  - Family and childcare support needs to be a priority to ensure that many residents are taken out of poverty. Working closely with schools to help identify concerns earlier.
- Cllr Maium Talukdar confirmed that he would take feedback back to partners and agreed the council needs to do more for residents in ensuring standards are raised for housing and GPs in the community.

### **3.2 THE COUNCIL'S 2023-24 BUDGET REPORT AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023-26**

The Council's 2023-24 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-26 was presented by Cllr Saied Ahmed and Nisar Visram, Director of Finance Audit and Procurement.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- With the growth predicted in the report, but also the large amount of savings needing to be found, how did the council rationalise this? Officers stated a number pressures the council is currently under, including from adult social care, which has created a funding need. This has presented a need for council to find savings across the organisation.
- What plans are there to curb the spending in the forecasted years? Officers detailed the process around the reporting that is carried out to both officer and member leadership teams and how spending is discussed and actioned in these meetings. There is a strong budget management process across these meetings and it allows for all parts of the council to take part.
- What investment will there be in youth services over the next few years? Cllr Saied Ahmed detailed the planned investments, highlighting an additional £8.5m in young Tower Hamlets.
- Are the current reserves of the council sustainable? Officers stated that while the council's constitution details what is the reserves policy, over the next few years, the council will have around £53m of reserves.
- Could the plans for the rollout of free home care be detailed? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated how budget pressures have meant free home care will not be able to start till the following year. Officers stated that the charging policy has meant that free home care would take more time to implement. Officers will provide members with a response on the consultation around home care chargers.
- What is the criteria about the schools within the school investments in the capital program? Why are some schools being prioritised over schools like George Green's School? Officers stated that programs like this are always under review, and based on the strategic plan some schools are prioritised.
- Will the current spending on staffing across the council, support the need to increase on core staffing? Officers detailed the current staffing plans including the statutory services, however the council will be looking at staffing when savings are needed and statutory staffing will be generally protected across the organisation, but budgets will be reviewed.
- How will the new grants funding be funded and what will the governance arrangements around it? Officers detailed how the spend has been allocated, but this is pending the recent resident consultation. The plans for the governance arrangements is to ensure it is open and transparent, these are still being finalised and officers confirmed this will be sent to members.
- Is the cost for covering free school meals sustainable? Officers reported the breakdown of the costs around free school meals, with around £2m for primary and £3.2m for secondary school meals. These costs have been built into the medium-term strategy.
- How achievable is the council's saving plan and what are the other areas of risk? Officers detailed the work that will be carried out to identify the savings. There will be monitoring around savings and potential risks through the levels of reporting the council does.

- Are there any updates on council tax rebates for self-employed residents? Cllr Saied Ahmed detailed the ongoing work around identifying support for these residents.
- How realistic is the income projections? Officers reported on the local government annual settlement from national government and how it makes it difficult to forecast for the coming years, but there is a reasonable level of confidence a council has based on the understanding of the potential funding.
- Is the staff funding that is being allocated to the Mayor's office fair, compared to all members of the council, who also have large and complicated casework needs? Cllr Saied Ahmed agreed that members do have a large amount of casework, but the Mayor has to deal with new casework, but also deal with a backlog of casework from the previous administration. The Mayor has an ambitious manifesto to deliver on and the new staffing reflects that.
- Members requested an update on how the staffing in the Mayor's Office is allocated and how this relates to spending on other member support. Members further requested details on the backlog the Mayor inherited of casework.

**RESOLVED:**

Members noted the Council's 2023-24 Budget Report and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-26.

**4. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS**

**RESOLVED:**

Members Noted the forward plan.

**5. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT**

**5.1 BOROUGH COMMANDER SPOTLIGHT**

This item will be presented at a future committee meeting.

**6. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS**

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

**7. WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

Members Noted the Report.

**8. ACTION NOTE**

**RESOLVED:**

Members Noted the Report.

**9. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'**

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

**11. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

Minutes will be presented at future meeting of the committee.

**12. 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

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

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

**15. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS**

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 19:50

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee