

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 19:39 ON MONDAY, 22 MAY 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Ahmodur Khan
Councillor Sabina Khan
Councillor Abdul Malik

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Marc Francis

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Sabina Akhatar
Mayor Lutfur Rahman

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Stephen Halsey	(Interim Chief Executive)	
Stephen Bramah	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Improvement)	
Sharon Godman	(Director Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)	
Matthew Eady	(Director of Commissioning & Culture)	
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Lead)	
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))	

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Filuck Miah	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Natalie Lovell	(Public Health Programme Manager)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Maisha Begum, Marc Francis. Councillor Sabina Akhatar substituted for Councillor Maisha Begum.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

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

3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-2024

Councillors was Bodrul Choudhury Was Elected Vice Chair.

4. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

None.

5. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Establishment of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees and Appointment of Members to those Sub-Committees

The Establishment of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees and Appointment of Members to those Sub-Committees was presented by Thomas French, Democratic Services Officer.

Councillor Ahmodur Rahman Khan was appointed Scrutiny Lead for Adults and Health Services (including Chairing the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee).

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury was appointed Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education (including Chairing the Children & Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee).

Councillor Abdul Mannan was appointed Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration (including Chairing the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee).

Councillor Abdul Malik was appointed Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety.

The appointment of the Scrutiny Lead for Resources was deferred to a future committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed to the recommendations within the report.

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

Nil items.

7. MAYOR'S SPOTLIGHT

The Mayor's Spotlight was presented by Mayor Lutfur Rahman, with Stephen Halsey, Interim Chief Executive and Stephen Bramah, Head of Corporate Strategy & Improvement, covering the achievements of the Council within 2022-24.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- How close are the council in reaching the house building targets? What progress is being made with bringing the council house management back in house? The Mayor stated that good homes for residents is a priority and is in partnership with organisations to deliver on this, including ensuring as many new homes are affordable as possible. Partnership working is important in housing, with Tower Hamlets Homes being brought in house and areas of regeneration within the borough.
- When will the free school meal roll out be achieved? How long will the free school provision be budgeted for? The Mayor reported that the free school meals will be rolled out in phases, with most starting in September, with other schools to follow in the next phases. The free school meal will be universal for all students.
- How is the council tackling crime within the borough? And will the council be requesting more police officers across the borough? How is crime being tackled in the council housing estates? Violence towards women and girls within the borough is a concern. The Mayor stated that the administration inherited a high crime borough and improvements in crime have been sought within the first year, including recruitment of local police and increased CCTV within the borough. There does need to be a cultural change in the borough to create a safe environment for women and girls and education can play a part in that, with investment in educational schemes.
- In what ways is the council learning about complaints? What examples can you suggest showing there have been improvements? The Mayor stated that residents bring complaints to him directly about services and these are brought to directors for action, but a lot of work needs to be done to ensure that residents see improvement in services. Stephen Halsey reported on how the council's corporate plan addresses complaints and how complaints are audited annually. Big concerns from residents are on housing and environment, including waste collections. Work will need to be done across the council to address these concerns.
- What understanding does the council have on its own grants provision? Will there be an effect on voluntary and community groups? The Mayor reported on the current grants process, which is delegated to Officers but welcomed organisations within the borough to apply for the grants. Stephen Halsey confirmed that grant giving is now delegated to Chief Executive, and will be audited and subject to scrutiny in the usual way.
- What is the council doing to improve its waste collection service? Stephen Halsey commented that process around improvements in waste collection is not going fast enough, but recent recruitment should

help with this and additional resources will be used to tackle the waste emergency.

- What is the progress on the improvements to Roman Road, when will the works be completed? The Mayor confirmed he will get back to the committee about the plans for Roman Road.
- Housing improvements in the borough can feel slow to see the progress. Residents have issues with organisations like Clarion Housing, what is being done to ensure standards are raised? Will the council escalate concerns about these organisations to national government level? The Mayor confirmed that he has heard many concerns raised by residents about slow improvements by organisations like Clarion Housing and this will be raised with the Executive Member. The Council will consider escalating concerns if action has not been taken.
- Can the Mayor confirm plans for the rollout of Idea Stores? The Mayor confirmed that £1.1m has been pledged to open five residents hubs by the end of 2023. The hubs need to be open and across the borough, to ensure all residents can access council services and get support.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the update.

8. TRACKING RECOMMENDATIONS - SWIMMING CHALLENGE SESSION

The recommendations on the Swimming Challenge Session was presented by Matthew Eady, Director of Commissioning & Culture.

The committee raised the following comments and questions:

- Students who were impacted by Covid-19 Pandemic were unable to gain swimming skills, will there be a chance for them to access swimming classes or events? Matthew Eady reflected on the impact the pandemic had on swim provision for children and confirmed he will look at how this can be provided for as currently schools get funding for a select group of ages.
- What is the provision for women and girls to access swim sessions? Will there be more accessible sessions for those with access needs? Matthew Eady confirmed that the council was exploring different concepts around accessible services in swimming. Staffing is important to ensure that women and girls feel they are able to take part in swim sessions and recruitment will be key to ensure this.
- Swimming groups are finding it hard to gain funding to keep swimming clubs running.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the recommendations.

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. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 20:43

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee