

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE CABINET****HELD AT 5.42 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2023****COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL****Members Present in Person:**

Mayor Lutfur Rahman	
Councillor Maium Talukdar	(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning (Statutory Deputy Mayor))
Councillor Kabir Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding)
Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
Councillor Suluk Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion)
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury	(Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care)
Councillor Abu Chowdhury	(Cabinet Member for Safer Communities)
Councillor Iqbal Hossain	(Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation)
Councillor Kabir Hussain	(Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency)
Councillor Abdul Wahid	(Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Growth)

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Shafi Ahmed	
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
Councillor Jahed Choudhury	(Speaker of the Council)
Councillor Peter Golds	
Councillor Kamrul Hussain	
Councillor Sirajul Islam	
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Amin Rahman	
Councillor Bellal Uddin	

Officers Present in Person:

John Ainsworth	(Senior Performance Improvement Analyst)
Ashraf Ali	(Scrutiny Policy Officer)
Yasmin Ali	(Development Project Manager, Place)
Rupert Brandon	Interim Head of Housing Supply
Raj Chand	(Director, Customer Services)
Janet Fasan	(Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Stephen Halsey	(Chief Executive)
Sam Harney	(Mayor's Political Advisor)
Fiona Heyland	(Head of Waste Strategy Policy and Procurement,

Amy Jackson	Public Realm)
Ellie Kershaw	(Head of Mayor's Office)
	(Acting Director, Growth and Economic Development)
Julie Lorraine	(Corporate Director Resources)
Raj Mistry	Corporate Director for Communities
Denise Radley	(Corporate Director, Health and Social Care)
Kamran Rashid	Interim Project Manager
Jed Scoles	(Political Advisory to the Minority Group)
Karen Swift	(Divisional Director, Housing and Regeneration)
James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children's Services)
David Tolley	(Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards)
Richard Williams	Business Manager Operational PR
Matthew Mannion	(Head of Democratic Services)
Jack Painter	Democratic Services Officer

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

John Harrison	Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit
Ian Austin	(Principal Lawyer for Planning)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 26 July 2023 be approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record of proceedings.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE MAYOR

The chief executive informed the Cabinet that the Council was currently in the middle of a strike by waste services operatives and provided assurance that the council was doing all it could to resolve the matter as soon as practicable. He advised that once the matter was resolved he would report back to the Cabinet.

5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions

Councillor Musthak Ahmed, Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee addressed the meeting on behalf of the Committee. He provided the Mayor and Cabinet with an overview of the Committee's recent meeting.

The Committee had considered the Liveable Streets Scheme reports and residents had attended the meeting to give their views. The Committee had discussed:

- The rationale for the consultation options and why residents were not consulted on option 3.
- Air quality data
- The extent of the consultation and inclusion of disabled and BAME residents; other stakeholders such as Fire Brigade and London Ambulance Service.
- There is a need for compromise to ensure we do not further divide our community and bring about the improvements that we all seek.
- Financial implications for the council and if we are required to reimburse TfL.

The Committee had considered the Customer Experience Strategy including:

- Learning from other areas such as Tower Hamlets Homes' on-line customer portal.
- How to support residents that are digitally excluded.
- How to best measure performance of the service.
- Investment in digital technology to meet future capacity.
- Parking permits.
- Wellbeing support to staff, burnout and mental health.

The Committee had also held in depth discussions on the licensing policy report and reviewed its work plan for 2023/24.

The Committee had submitted pre-decision scrutiny questions on two of the items on the Cabinet agenda:

- 6.1 Q1 Performance Report: Year 2 of the Annual Delivery Plan of the Strategy Plan 2022-24.
- 6.4/6.5 – Liveable Streets Bethnal Green and Brick Lane.

These were considered in relation to the relevant items.

5.2 Any Unrestricted Decisions "Called in" by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Nil items.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Q1 Performance Report: Year 2 of the Annual Delivery Plan of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024

The Pre-Decision Scrutiny Question and officer response was noted.

Councillor Saied Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living) introduced the report which provided the Mayor in Cabinet with a Quarter 1 monitoring update of Year 2 Annual Delivery Plan 2023-24 performance measures.

John Ainsworth, Senior Performance Improvement Analyst, provided further detail on the performance measures and outcome of the quarter. The Chief Executive explained how the budget setting process would align resources to service improvement and a report on this would be received by Cabinet in due course.

Cabinet members welcomed the report and provided explanation for the causes of underperforming measures in their service areas and the efforts and planned measures, including proposed investment, to improve performance.

The Mayor welcomed the report which he felt provided a robust health check of the Council. He stressed expectation that all red rated measures would turn green before year-end.

RESOLVED

1. To note the strategic delivery and performance report for Q1 covering the period of 1st April 2023 to 30th June 2023.
2. To note the of 51 performance measures in Q1 tracking the delivery of Year 2 of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 (Appendix A to the report).

6.2 Budget Monitoring 23/24 Q1

The reasons for urgency were agreed.

Councillor Saied Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living) introduced the report which presented the current forecast year end outturn compared to the budget as at Quarter 1 for the General Fund, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Housing Revenue Account (HRA), progress against savings targets, the council's capital programme and provided projections on General Fund earmarked reserves. Councillor Ahmed provided additional details on the causes of overspends and underspends as reflected in the report, for each of the budgets. He explained that unachievable savings would need to be addressed in future updates. Finally, he explained the causes for capital programme variance and how slippages would be carried

forward into future years, both for the general fund, and HRA capital programmes

Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director Resources and John Harkin, Interim Director Finance Procurement and Audit, explained the current context of local authority financial challenges. Julie explained that the Council compared favourably to other local councils in respect of managing its budget saving slippages and was already taking measures to address them. Julie also warned that some of the drivers of overspend were likely to continue for the next few years. John explained that the Council would be thorough in ensuring its financial performance did not deteriorate in the way some authorities elsewhere in the country had recently experienced.

The Chief Executive echoed the comments of Julie and John. He stressed the council's financial position could not be compared to other local authorities that were in dire financial circumstances. He stressed that the council was resilient, had robust systems in place, had sufficient reserves and had a high-quality team to deliver balanced budget, savings and growth.

Julie also provided an update to the Mayor and Cabinet on the current position regarding the closure of outstanding accounts. Julie provided assurance that the closure outstanding accounts would be progressed, but asked members to note that there remained risks which would be closely monitored.

RESOLVED

1. To note the council's position and consequent forecast outturn as at 30th June 2023, against General Fund Budget (based on the previous structures), Dedicated Schools Budget, Housing Revenue Account and earmarked reserves for 2023-24.
2. To note the actions taken to date to address the demand pressures as set out in Appendix A, Section 3.2 to the report.
3. To note the progress made against the 2023-24 savings targets, based on forecasts as of 30th June 2023.
4. To note the council's forecast outturn position against General Fund and Housing Revenue Account capital programme approved budgets for 2023-24, based on forecasts as of 30th June 2023.
5. To note that there are no equalities implications directly resulting from this report, as set out in Section 4 of the report.
6. To approve capital investment of £80k in the London Community Credit Union (LCCU) funded from the COVID reserve.

Action by:

CORPORATE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES (JULIE LORRAINE)

(Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit (John Harrison))

(Head of Strategic Finance (Chief Accountant) (Ahsan Khan)

6.3 Housing Development Capital Programme Additions

Councillor Kabir Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding) introduced the report which set out proposals for additional funding for new schemes to the Council's Housing Development Capital Programme, part of the wider HRA Capital Programme. Councillor Ahmed explained how the proposals would help to deliver good quality council-owned homes in the borough which would help to address the borough's housing crisis.

Karen Swift, Director of Housing, provided further detail. Karen explained that, in addition to addition of schemes to the programme, the report explained how other sites were under consideration and asked for delegation for resources to move forward to those sites.

Cabinet members welcomed the report and thanked all officers and councillors involved in the delivery of the schemes.

The Chief Executive echoed the sentiments of the Cabinet. He noted the dedication shown by officers in delivering this key priority of the administration's manifesto.

The Mayor welcomed the report and stressed how important his administration felt about overcrowding in the borough. He expressed hope the proposals in the report, particularly those to deliver more council-owned homes, would help address the problem.

RESOLVED

1. To approve the increased budget of £73.223m to the Housing Development Capital programme.
2. To approve the schemes listed as additions to the programme as set out in paragraph 3 table 1 of the report.
3. To approve the changes listed within the existing programme as set out in paragraph 3 table 3 of the report.
4. To approve that subject to prior consultation with the Mayor by the Corporate Director of Housing and Regeneration and the Corporate Director of Resources schemes can be amended and substituted and that additional schemes can be added provided that the capital sum set out in recommendation 1 above is not exceeded.
5. To approve that subject to prior consultation with the Mayor by the Corporate Director of Housing and Regeneration and the Corporate Director of Resources that should additional funding be identified this can be added to the programme.

6. To note potential additions to the programme in future at paragraph 3 table 2 of the report.
7. To approve the increase in budget for additional staff resources as set out in paragraph 3.7 of the report.
8. To note the existing programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
9. To note the comparative performance of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets compared to neighbouring boroughs in the delivery of homes, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
10. To note the Equalities Impact Assessment / specific equalities considerations as set out in paragraph 4 of the report.

6.4 Liveable Streets Bethnal Green consultation outcome and measures

The Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions and officer responses were noted.

The Mayor formally introduced items 6.4 and 6.5 which he indicated he would consider together. Councillor Kabir Hussain (Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency) introduced the reports which sought approval for one of three main options for the retention or removal of a number of existing traffic schemes in the Old Bethnal Green, Columbia Road and Arnold Circus (Item 6.4) and Brick Lane (Item 6.5) areas. Raj Mistry, Corporate Director Communities, provided further detail.

At the invitation of the Mayor, the following persons addressed the meeting to ask questions regarding items 6.4 and 6.5.

- Councillor Peter Golds expressed concern at the response to the consultation exercises on LTNs which he felt did not appear to represent the widest possible demography of the Borough.
- Councillor Sirajul Islam asked if the Mayor was disappointed that there were instances throughout the reports where the effects of LTN schemes could not be accurately quantified and asked if it was right that without this information he and his cabinet could not make an informed choice.
- Councillor Nathalie Bienfait asked whether, in view of the resident support for the schemes in and the evidence for the need to reduce the impact of cars on roads, what steps the Mayor would take to reduce the numbers and impact of cars on our roads. And, if he decided to choose Option 1 or Option 3 in the report, what steps he would take to mitigate the potential impact of removing the low traffic schemes on areas which had become used to a low traffic environment.
- Sam Wood asked how the views of Bart's Health Trust or the Royal London Hospital and Mile End Hospital were being taken into consideration. The position of the Trust was documented in a letter to

the Mayor in August 2022. Mr Wood advised the Trust had made no update or change to the response since then.

- Elizabeth Perrett asked how the Mayor would ensure elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents would not continue to be adversely affected by ambulance delays as was her mother, who had lived on Old Bethnal Green Rd and was repeatedly subjected to major delays during many serious health issues.
- Nikki Collins asked if there were any reasons why the Mayor would not now deliver on his number one promise.

In response to the public and Councillor contributions, the Mayor indicated that the comments and questions from residents clearly showed the passion regarding the LTN issue. He felt the contributions showed that some residents had been failed by the system and had suffered as a result of LTN measures and he was aware of many similar instances of residents being negatively affected. He welcomed the contributions which he felt would assist him in his determination on this issue.

Cabinet members welcomed the report and indicated support for removal of the traffic measures. They noted with dismay the adverse impacts the schemes had had on many residents and expressed confidence that an alternative solution could be delivered to improve green infrastructure which would not divide and adversely impact residents, as had the current Liveable Streets Schemes.

The Mayor welcomed the report which he felt was well written and provided clear recommendations. He made a statement that included the following points:

- Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) had been one of London's most divisive issues in recent years. The Council had found itself caught up in regional, national and even international politics which had made the business of running the Council more challenging. LTNs had divided political parties, but most detrimentally divided residents. Neighbouring London boroughs such as Brent and Ealing had removed LTNs because of their divisiveness. In Tower Hamlets the divisions had been considerable.
- Tower Hamlets was an inner-city local authority with narrow streets and tall buildings. Residents had less space to move around than other London neighbours. A one-size-fits-all approach to improve air quality, with limited consultation introduced in the middle of the COVID lockdown was always likely to cause disunity amongst residents. The recent consultation showed that whilst LTNs improved air quality in the immediate vicinity, they push traffic down surrounding arterial roads typically occupied by less affluent residents. LBTH had the third lowest car ownership rate in London, but a significant portion of its local economy was dependent on car usage, particularly among lower paid workers such as taxi drivers, couriers and businesses such as market

traders. The emergency services had divided views on LTNs. The London Ambulance Service, for example, opposed hard physical closures. Council services had struggled to reach all our residents in a timely way because of closures leading to waste cleanliness issues across the borough.

- The recent consultation showed division amongst residents: whilst there was support for retaining the scheme, roughly 42% of residents wanted them removed. The consultation process was challenging, with around 3,000 respondents in total. Many of them did not live in Tower Hamlets. For residents-only results, the margin was in the low-hundreds. Opposition to LTNs was a key issue in the 2022 Council and Mayoral elections, in which the Mayor was elected with over 40,000 votes and the Aspire party won an overall majority of Council seats.
- Having carefully considered the issues the mayor had considered that division was not the answer and that the Council could find better ways to reduce air pollution, whilst uniting residents and businesses rather than dividing them. The Council would start again by removing the bulk of existing LTNs in the borough and propose new solutions that spread the costs and benefits of traffic reduction schemes amongst residents.
- The consultation on residents views had aimed to understand the finer details. The consultation had led to the retention of several schemes. The Mayor had previously announced that Wapping Bus Gate would be retained due to resident support. The Council would also retain the road closure on Canrobert St. Walking routes and spaces would be retained as they had proved beneficial to most residents. School streets, which facilitated the timed closure of roads to allow drop off and pick up children, would also be retained. The Council would invest £6m to improve air quality including improving road safety, building more infrastructure to promote walking and cycling and enhancing public spaces including planting more trees. It would work with residents on new schemes which were universally supported. People were more likely to embrace wider public health initiatives if they were part of the solution. The Mayor believed the Council could build the most successful approach to reducing toxic air pollution in the borough, one that did not push costs on to the most disadvantaged residents and listened to them instead.

Accordingly, the Mayor agreed to adopt option 1 from the reports, subject to retention of the closure on Canrobert Street.

The recommendations were amended and then agreed.

RESOLVED

1. To note the results of the engagement to date and two public consultations held in Weavers and Old Bethnal Green Road.

2. To approve Option One (of the three options summarised in section 2 of the report).
 - a. Subject to the retention of the closure of Canrobert Street in Bethnal Green.
3. To note that Appendix F - EqIA to the report identifies a number of positive and negative impacts of the options upon individuals that share particular protected characteristics (summarised in paragraphs 4.1 – 4.5 of the report).
4. To approve any changes to be implemented through experimental traffic orders so that amendments can be made to mitigate any adverse impacts that are identified through monitoring.
5. To approve a 12-month review of traffic flows and air quality to assess the impact of the proposals for the purposes of identifying any negative impacts and developing mitigation measures.
6. To approve the use of existing frameworks or term contracts to award an order up to the value determined for completion of the works.

6.5 Liveable Streets Brick Lane consultation outcome and measures

The Pre-Decision Scrutiny Questions, and officer responses, were noted.

For the record of discussion on this item, see minute for Item 6.4 Liveable Streets Bethnal Green consultation outcome and measures. The two items were considered together.

RESOLVED

1. To note the results of the public consultation and engagement with businesses in the Brick Lane area.
2. To approve Option One (of the two options set out on the report).
3. To note that the Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment to the report identifies a number of positive and negative impacts of the options upon individuals that share particular protected characteristics (summarised in paragraphs 4.1 – 4.3 of the report).

6.6 Tower Hamlets Reduction and Recycling Plan 2023 - 2025

Councillor Kabir Hussain (Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency) introduced the report which proposed a Reduction and Recycling Plan for 2023 to 2025 as the first phase of plans to deliver a clean and green future for Tower Hamlets. The plan included proposals to optimise recycling collections, deliver over £2million in flats recycling improvements and develop improved communication and community engagement.

Raj Mistry, Corporate Director Communities and Fiona Heyland, Environmental Services Improvement Manager provided further detail.

The Chief Executive asked the Mayor to note that the officer recommendations, which had been omitted from the published report in error, had asked the Mayor to approve the Reduction and Recycling Plan for 2023 to 2025 and had asked the Mayor to request that officers would report back on progress against the plan on a quarterly basis, using the indicators in the plan as the basis for reporting.

Cabinet members welcomed the report.

The Mayor welcomed the report and thanked officers for their commitment to increasing recycling performance in the borough.

RESOLVED

1. To note and agree the Recycling and Reduction Plan 2023-2025 (RRP) set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
2. To note the council has ambition to increase recycling performance further from 2025/26 onwards.
3. To note the equalities considerations as set out in Paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of the report.
4. To note that a report will be submitted to Cabinet on a quarterly basis detailing progress that has been made against the targets detailed in the plan.

6.7 Tower Hamlets Customer Experience Strategy

Councillor Kabir Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding) introduced the report which presented the final version of the Tower Hamlets Customer Experience Strategy 2023 -2026 for approval. Councillor Ahmed explained how the Strategy would address a range of infrastructure concerns first identified by the administration after the May 2022 election and for which investment had been agreed as part of the administration's first budget.

Raj Chand, Director of Customer Services provided further detail. The Mayor welcomed the report. He offered thanks to Raj Chand who would shortly be leaving the Council and wished her well in her new role.

RESOLVED

1. To note the outcome of the public and staff engagement that informs the Tower Hamlets Customer Experience Strategy 2023-26.
2. To agree the Tower Hamlets Customer Experience Strategy 2023-26.

6.8 Review of Statement of Licensing Policy 2023

The Mayor introduced the report which, further to the Council's duty to prepare and publish a Statement of Licensing Policy at least every 5 years, proposed a new Statement of Licensing Policy.

David Tolley, Head of Licensing and Environmental Health provided further detail.

The Mayor welcomed the report.

RESOLVED

1. To recommend to Full Council the adoption of the Statement of Licensing Policy at full Council which will take effect from 1st November 2023.

7. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT**7.1 Mellish Street - Approval to directly award Contract**

The reasons for urgency were agreed.

Councillor Kabir Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding) introduced the report which sought the formal approval for the Council to enter into a contractual agreement with London MEP to complete the mechanical and engineering works and commissioning at Mellish Street.

Yasmin Ali, Head of Capital Delivery and Property maintenance, explained the reason the Mayor was being asked to act on the matter now and the urgency for the report.

The Mayor welcomed the report.

RESOLVED

1. To authorise the Corporate Director, Housing and Regeneration to waive the requirement to subject this purchase to competition as required by the Council's Constitution
2. To authorise the Corporate Director, Housing and Regeneration to enter into a contractual agreement with London MEP to complete the mechanical and engineering works and commissioning at Mellish Street for the sum of £300,810.95.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Nil items.

9. EXEMPT / CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

10. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions in Relation to Exempt / Confidential Business

Nil items.

10.2 Any Exempt / Confidential Decisions "Called in" by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Nil items.

11. EXEMPT / CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Nil items.

12. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.

Chair, Mayor Lutfur Rahman
Cabinet