

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS****MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL****HELD AT 7.04 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2023****COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL****Members Present:**

Mayor Lutfur Rahman (Member)	Councillor Peter Golds (Member)
Councillor Faroque Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Iqbal Hossain (Member)
Councillor Kabir Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Kabir Hussain (Member)
Councillor Leelu Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Kamrul Hussain (Member)
Councillor Musthak Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Shahaveer Shubo Hussain (Member)
Councillor Saied Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Asma Islam (Member)
Councillor Shafi Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Sirajul Islam (Member)
Councillor Suluk Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Ahmodul Kabir (Member)
Councillor Ohid Ahmed (Member)	Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled (Member)
Councillor Sabina Akhtar (Member)	Councillor Ahmodur Khan (Member)
Councillor Amina Ali (Member)	Councillor James King (Member)
Councillor Asma Begum (Member)	Councillor Abdul Malik (Member)
Councillor Maisha Begum (Member)	Councillor Abdul Mannan (Member)
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait (Member)	Councillor Ana Miah (Member)
Councillor Rachel Blake (Member)	Councillor Harun Miah (Member)
Councillor Mufedah Bustin (Member)	Councillor Amin Rahman (Member)
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury (Member)	Councillor Rebaka Sultana (Member)
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury (Member)	Councillor Maium Talukdar (Member)
Councillor Jahed Choudhury (Member)	Councillor Bellal Uddin (Member)
Councillor Abu Chowdhury (Member)	Councillor Abdal Ullah (Member)
Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury (Member)	Councillor Abdul Wahid (Member)
Councillor Marc Francis (Member)	

**The Speaker of the Council, Councillor Jahed Choudhury in the Chair**

The Speaker of the Council provided his update to the Council. He noted that he had attended several events, including events to mark anniversaries of organisations such as the QVSR who had celebrated 180 years of service. Other highlights included:

- Welcoming new citizens to the borough at Citizenship ceremonies.
- Attending events to celebrate Black History Month. The speaker had attended the Living Legacies exhibition celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of the Windrush generation. He had also attended the Grand Union Orchestra performance.

- The Speaker had attended the opening night of a Season of Bangla Drama, which he highly recommended.
- He had visited the charities that he is supporting – St Joseph’s Hospice and Eden Care UK and said he looked forward to the annual fundraiser being held in December 2023.
- He said he had attended the civic ceremony at Westminster Abbey and the Lord Mayor show.
- He had participated in the Annual Peace Walk which was organised by the National Hate Crime awareness week. He said that in Tower Hamlets the message was clear that there was No Place for Hate.

Lastly, the Speaker spoke of the ongoing tragedy in the Middle East. He said the Borough had always welcomed people from around the world fleeing persecution or seeking opportunity, who made Tower Hamlets their home. He said the ongoing death and destruction in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel was difficult to bear. He said the Council was working with its partners to ensure all communities can live safely side by side.

The Speaker expressed his condolences to Palestinians and Israelis who had lost loved ones and urged leaders to urgently call for a ceasefire and seek a lasting peace.

The Chief Executive, Mr Stephen Halsey also expressed his thoughts relating to the on-going destruction of Gaza and the steps the Council had taken to ensure community harmony, especially as tensions were running high.

The Chamber stood for a minute’s silence in recognition of the deaths of innocent civilians.

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Amy Lee
- Councillor Ayas Miah

Councillor Sabina Khan was unable to join the meeting in person but joined remotely. It was noted that she would be unable to vote as she was not formally in attendance.

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

Councillors Ahmodur Khan, Bodrul Choudhury, Abdul Wahid, Abdul Mannan, Maium Talukdar and Abdal Ullah declared a non-disclosable other interest in

item 8, the Opposition Motion for Debate on Support for the Information and Advice Sector as they had links to the voluntary sector but not within the advice sector.

Councillor Mushtak Ahmed declared that as the Council's appointed representative on the East End Citizens Advice Bureau he had a non-disclosable other interest in relation to the advice sector but not in relation to the body referenced in the motion.

All Members remained in the chamber for the debate on the motion.

### **3. MINUTES**

The Council **RESOVLED** to:

1. Agreed that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary Council meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Speaker was authorised to sign them accordingly.

### **4. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

#### **Announcements from the Chief Executive**

The Chief Executive, Stephen Halsey provided his regular update to the Council meeting, highlighting the following issues:

- He informed Council that the Annual Governance Statements were now available publicly for all four years up to and including 2022-23. He said this was important especially in the absence of the signed off accounts which were in the process of being reviewed and signed off by the Audit Committee.
- Mr Halsey provided an update on the Corporate Peer Review and said they were working with the LGA Peer Review Team, who would be publishing their report and action plan in December 2023.
- He provided an update regarding the Corporate Leadership Team and new appointments to it. He welcomed Mr Paul Patterson as the Corporate Director for Housing and Regeneration and wished Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children Services the best in his new role at Birmingham's Children Trust.
- Finally, Mr Halsey reported the Covid rates were stable. He encouraged everyone to benefit from the current Covid-19 and flu vaccination programme which was launched in September 2023.

### **5. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**

#### **5.1 Petition requesting Public Space Protection Order to ban nuisance vehicles**

Mr Andrew Wood presented his petition regarding Public Space Protection Order to ban nuisance vehicles. He asked the Council to introduce a Public

Space Protection Order (PSPO) to allow the Police and Council to deal with nuisance vehicles more effectively. He explained how noise disturbed residents with vehicles revving engines, performing tunnel runs and being a danger to residents. He said a PSPO could help control anti-social behaviour and should be applied across the borough of Tower Hamlets.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities responded to matters raised in the petition. He said the Council and the Police were working closely together bringing different resources and enforcement powers to deal with issues. However, it was correct to state that the Council does have no specific power currently to deal with vehicles causing nuisance.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director for Communities for a written response within 28 days.

### **5.2 Petition requesting Refund for missed waste collections**

Mr Micheal Bundy and Ms Lyn Misselbrook presented their petition requesting a refund of Council Tax for the missed rubbish and recycling collections during the summer. Mr Bundy said the missed collections resulted in rubbish being piled up, causing a health hazard and therefore council taxpayers ought to be compensated from the public purse.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency responded to matters raised in the petition. He said the Council's Waste Operations were insourced in March 2020 from Veolia. No compensation payments had been paid to the Council for the one-week loss in service during the national strike action. He said the main factor for the strike was a national dispute on pay that affected Tower Hamlets unionised employees.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director for Communities for a written response within 28 days.

### **5.3 Petition regarding Tower Hamlets Housing Allocation system for single people**

Mr Terry McGrenera presented his petition concerning housing allocation for single people. He said he had brought the petition following the fatal fire in Shadwell. He stated that the housing allocation system needed to be applied more fairly to those requiring social housing who were single and that the focus should not be just on families.

Members asked questions of the petitioner before Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding responded to matters raised in the petition. He said all residents who have lived in the borough for three years and who had recourse to public funds were able to register on the Council's Housing Register. He said there were currently over 24,000 applicants on the register, of which 10,444 require 1 bedroom accommodation. Last year the council allocated 476 1-bedroom homes to those on the register. Councillor Kabir stated that whilst single people were able to register and some would receive housing, there was a mismatch of supply and demand and unfortunately the council was unable to help all those requiring housing, however the Council endeavours to provide advice on other housing solutions that might be available.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the petition be referred to the Interim Corporate Director for Housing and Regeneration for a written response within 28 days.

## **6. MAYOR'S REPORT**

Mayor Lutfur Rahman presented his report to the Council.

The Opposition Group Leader, Councillor Sirajul Islam then responded briefly to the Mayor's report.

Mayor Rahman provided concluding remarks.

## **7. ADMINISTRATION MOTION DEBATE**

### **LOCAL PLAN**

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on the Local Plan that had been moved by Councillor Kabir Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury.

### **Meeting Adjournment**

During the debate on the Administration Motion the Speaker of the Council moved to adjourn the meeting for half an hour under Procedure Rule 14.2 (4) to allow for a discussion on how to best proceed with the business following challenges from Members. At the conclusion of the adjournment the Speaker agreed under Procedure Rule 14.1 (d) that the debate move straight to the right to reply and vote.

Following debate, the motion moved by Councillor Kabir Ahmed was put to the vote and was **agreed**.

**RESOLVED****This Council notes:**

- That overcrowding in the borough had been left unchecked from the years 2015 to 2022, with over 14,000 residents now classified as living in acutely overcrowded conditions.
- That the development of new, affordable homes for rent has not kept pace with the rapid population growth and concomitant rise in said overcrowding, with some years during the period 2015-2022 seeing as little as 140 homes completed in a single year.
- That the development of affordable housing has always played a central role of critical importance to Mayor Lutfur Rahman and his team, who delivered thousands of affordable, social homes for rent during his previous administrations.
- That this commitment has continued into this current administration's first term, with at least 4,000 affordable homes for rent pledged to be delivered, and over 1,000 already built or in the pipeline.
- That the Council's current Local Plan is due for a refresh, with the first version of this refreshed Plan – regulation 18 – passing through Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

**This Council believes:**

- That the delivery of affordable rented homes has slowed over the past seven years.
- That restrictive policies have prevented a greater number of affordable homes from being built, due to a limitation on height, density and the percentage of affordable units that must be delivered per development, alongside the tenure mix between affordable rented homes and intermediate properties.
- That the previous local plan was not ambitious enough to meet the growing demand for affordable and sustainable housing in Tower Hamlets.
- That the current proposed refresh will revolutionise and expedite the way that affordable housing is delivered in the years to come, tackling the overcrowding crisis at a much greater pace and providing decent, affordable homes to the residents of Tower Hamlets.
- That this is demonstrated in the proposed commitment to raising the affordable housing criteria expected of developers from the existing 35% threshold to a more ambitious 40%; a redressing of the 70:30

affordable/ intermediate split of this 40% to a revised 85:15 ratio – guaranteeing more *genuinely* affordable homes for residents; and through the prioritisation of the development of 3 and 4 bedroom properties to accommodate the growing family-sized population of the borough.

- That this refreshed Local Plan will see height and density prioritised to help maximise the delivery of affordable housing, with the whole borough becoming a Tall Building Zone (TBZ) where this does not impact on cultural or heritage conservation areas. This will include a pushing of the maximum building height threshold to 23 storeys.
- That this refreshed Local Plan will be a catalyst for further social and economic development for all residents, as well as protecting and enhancing the borough's local environment and green spaces.
- That this refreshed Local Plan will respect, enhance and incorporate heritage and conservation areas into all new developments.
- That this refreshed Local Plan should be made accessible to all residents in the borough – regardless of language, race or background – to ensure that a fair and holistic engagement process is ensured, and all resident voices are heard.

**This Council resolves:**

- To support and promote engagement with the Regulation 18 version of the refreshed local plan for all residents.
- To work with the BME media to help promote this engagement.
- To commend the Lead Member and Officers for their hard work in capturing the ambition of this administration regarding housebuilding within the document.
- To request regular updates on the journey of the refreshed Local Plan through the relevant stages of its progression.

**8. OPPOSITION MOTION DEBATE**

**MORE SUPPORT FOR THE INFORMATION AND ADVISE SECTOR**

Council considered a motion as printed in the agenda on more support for the Information and Advice Sector that had been moved by Councillor Mufeedah Bustin and seconded by Councillor Sabina Akhtar.

Council also considered the amendment proposed by Councillor Saied Ahmed and seconded by Councillor Kabir Ahmed as set out in the supplementary agenda.

Additions – Bold

Deletions – ~~Struck through~~

**This council notes:**

1. **That the administration is committed to helping our vulnerable and disadvantaged residents, especially those affected by the current cost of living crisis.**
2. The voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets provides critical support to our residents, particularly in times of crisis.
3. The council's support of the information and advice sector is unique: many council's have reduced grants for this vital service.
4. Despite government funding reducing by over £200M in 10 years, the previous administration continued to invest in the information and advice sector, providing £900,000pa per year to the advice consortium from 2018-2023.
5. **The current funding strategy has ensured a good spread of resources, better access to services for all that need them and value for money.**
6. The 2021 LBTH Poverty Review identified the impact of multiple factors effecting residents' livelihoods, including the pandemic, a reduced welfare state and Brexit.
7. The Cost of Living crisis, high inflation and increasing interest rates, as well as the increasing cost of rents, is having a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of Tower Hamlets residents.
8. The Poverty Review also identified the important of local intervention in creating a safety net, in particular:  
"To make the biggest practical difference to residents, we recommend that the council works in partnership with other organisations and the community to achieve a step change....." through "early financial intervention - taking a whole systems approach to increasing incomes, reducing costs, and averting financial crisis and homelessness"
9. ~~That the 2023 Mayor's Community Fund has not increased the budgetary allocation for information and advice. Inflation means this is in effect a budgetary reduction, meaning reduced support for our residents.~~
10. **Despite budgetary challenges, administration has prioritised support for local information and advice services.**
11. **That the administration should be commended for maintaining current levels of funding to support the sector and service users.**

**This council further believes:**

12. That the information and advice sector is experiencing an increased demand on its services as more and more people are seeking support and advice on a range of matters.
13. That this demand will increase significantly once the rollout of Universal Credit is fully implemented in the next 12 months.
14. That cross-organisation initiatives such as Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) provides efficiencies of scale, training and up to date welfare information, as well as resource sharing across the sector.
15. THCAN also maintains the digital referral system which allows organisations and individuals to refer cases to advisors which reduces waiting times and ensure urgent issues can be dealt with, preventing residents from experiencing crises and destitution.
- ~~16. This is not the time to be reducing support to the information and advice sector, and the council should, instead be increasing support.~~
- 17. That resources have been protected by this administration to deliver critical information and advice provision across the borough.**

**This council resolves:**

- ~~18. To call on Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the Lead Member to review the allocation of funding to the information and advice sector and THCAN with a view to increasing it and ensuring ongoing support.~~
- 19. To work with the Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Lead Member to explore support arrangements for THCAN and the wider sector in future.**

Following debate the amendment moved by Councillor Saied Ahmed and the substantive motion as amended were put to the vote and were **agreed**.

**RESOLVED**

**This council notes:**

1. That the administration is committed to helping our vulnerable and disadvantaged residents, especially those affected by the current cost of living crisis.
2. The voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets provides critical support to our residents, particularly in times of crisis.
3. The council's support of the information and advice sector is unique: many council's have reduced grants for this vital service.

4. Despite government funding reducing by over £200M in 10 years, the previous administration continued to invest in the information and advice sector, providing £900,000pa per year to the advice consortium from 2018-2023.
5. The current funding strategy has ensured a good spread of resources, better access to services for all that need them and value for money.
6. The 2021 LBTH Poverty Review identified the impact of multiple factors effecting residents' livelihoods, including the pandemic, a reduced welfare state and Brexit.
7. The Cost-of-Living crisis, high inflation and increasing interest rates, as well as the increasing cost of rents, is having a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of Tower Hamlets residents.
8. The Poverty Review also identified the important of local intervention in creating a safety net, in particular:
9. "To make the biggest practical difference to residents, we recommend that the council works in partnership with other organisations and the community to achieve a step change....." through "early financial intervention - taking a whole systems approach to increasing incomes, reducing costs, and averting financial crisis and homelessness"
10. Despite budgetary challenges, administration has prioritised support for local information and advice services.
11. That the administration should be commended for maintaining current levels of funding to support the sector and service users.

**This council further believes:**

12. That the information and advice sector is experiencing an increased demand on its services as more and more people are seeking support and advice on a range of matters.
13. That this demand will increase significantly once the rollout of Universal Credit is fully implemented in the next 12 months.
14. That cross-organisation initiatives such as Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) provides efficiencies of scale, training and up to date welfare information, as well as resource sharing across the sector.
15. THCAN also maintains the digital referral system which allows organisations and individuals to refer cases to advisors which reduces waiting times and ensure urgent issues can be dealt with, preventing residents from experiencing crises and destitution.
16. That resources have been protected by this administration to deliver critical information and advice provision across the borough.

**This council resolves:**

17. To work with the Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Lead Member to explore support arrangements for THCAN and the wider sector in future.

## **9. REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES**

### **9.1 Report of the Standards Advisory Committee: Adoption of the Updated Member / Officer Relations Protocol**

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning presented the report of the Standards Advisory Committee concerning the adoption of the updated member/officer relations protocol. Members of the Council commented on the report.

#### **RESOLVED**

Council **AGREED** to:

1. To adopt the revised Member/Officer Relations Protocol;
2. Agree that the updated Protocol be added to the Council's Constitution.

## **10. OTHER BUSINESS**

Nil Items.

## **11. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

The following questions and in each case supplementary questions were put (except where indicated) and were responded to by the Mayor or relevant Executive Member.

### **11.1 Question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed**

Could the lead member provide an update on the council's outstanding accounts requiring sign off? These accounts were left unsigned for years under the previous administration.

#### **Response of Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living**

The 2018/19 and 2019/20 accounts are expected to be signed off at the end of November.

Following widespread speculation of the shape and form of a central government initiative to ensure that the backlog of previous years' accounts is addressed, the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts will all be published

early in the new year (re-presented in the case of the 2020/21 accounts). The hope and expectation is that the accounts will be able to go through the required statutory processes, although the precise shape and form of the audit is as yet unknown – there is speculation that government will issue special guidance for auditors.

### **Supplementary question from Councillor Shafi Ahmed.**

How can we ensure delays to the accounts do not happen again?

### **Response of Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living**

It's important to note that the 2016/17 and 2017/18 accounts have been certified and now with the appointment of a permanent Section 151 Officer, the council is working towards completing the accounts for the outstanding years. Officers have been applying the improvement and have vastly improved the processes involved. The Council is awaiting the guidance from Central government regarding how the delayed accounts should be dealt with.

### **11.2 Question from Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury.**

A significant number of residents in Mile End, as well as throughout Tower Hamlets, are facing challenges when it comes to electric car charging. The availability of both slow and fast chargers is currently insufficient, leading to car owners driving around for extended periods in search of a charging station, which results in time-consuming charging processes. This situation is adversely impacting people's employment and daily routines. Could you please provide information about the council's strategy and plans for the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the area?

### **Response from Councillor Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency**

The Council has published an EV strategy, which can be found at the following link <https://talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/evchargers>. The following sets out the numbers to be installed up to 2030

<b>Year</b>	<b>2023/24 Delivery target</b>	<b>2024/25 Delivery target</b>	<b>2025/26 Delivery target</b>	<b>Total Target for 2026</b>	<b>Total Target for 2030</b>
<b>Slow</b>	350	650	800	1800	5000
<b>Fast</b>	50	60	90	200	500
<b>Rapid</b>	10	10	15	35	100
<b>Total</b>	410	720	905	2035	5600

### **11.3 Question from Councillor Amin Rahman.**

Can the lead member provide an update on the outcome of the LGA Corporate Peer Review which took place between 18th and 22nd September of this year?

**Response of Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living**

The LGA Corporate Peer Review Process is a robust and rigorous assurance and improvement tool managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector. It is designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. The Review Process covers:

1. Local priorities and outcomes
2. Organisational and place leadership
3. Governance and culture
4. Financial planning and management
5. Capacity for improvement

As the last LGA Corporate Peer Review had been completed 5 years ago and it is good practice to ensure a full review is undertaken every five years, The LGA were invited back to undertake a corporate peer review of the Council by the Mayor and the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive asked that the peer review, when covering the above five areas, undertake a deeper review of leadership of place, finance and governance.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Amin Rahman.**

When is the LGA Peer Review going to be published?

**Response of Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living**

A formal report is scheduled to be published by the LGA in December.

A draft action plan will be prepared to draw together the actions necessary to address the recommendations emerging from the Peer Review. Following Council / Mayoral approval it is planned to be published alongside the LGA Peer Review Report in December.

**11.4 Question from Councillor Marc Francis.**

How many homeless families are still currently housed in B&Bs beyond the six-week limit?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding**

As of November 2023, we have 229 families in Bed and Breakfast. We have inherited a perfect storm. With increased mortgage and interest rates and lack of social housing, the numbers of families seeking suitable accommodation including temporary accommodation has increased. We are waiting for the government to legislate against this. It's not just Tower Hamlets who is struggling with this but Councils across the country.

**Supplementary question from Councillor Marc Francis.**

Can the lead member state why Tower Hamlets is such an outlier of the 6-weeks limit?

**Response from Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding**

Tower Hamlets is taking steps to address this and is supporting residents. We have accommodated families in specific Bed and Breakfast hotels rather than corporate hotels and have set up modular homes for the homeless. We have our new local plan and hope to increase the amount of social housing available to us.

**11.5 Question from Councillor Kamrul Hussain.**

Could the lead member explain how he intends to generate much needed income from events in Victoria Park? Can he tell us how many events are being considered over the year, their capacities and how much does he expect to raise? I understand this money will go towards balancing the council budget as well as maintaining the park.

**Response of Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living**

Victoria Park is a key asset of the Council. It is a green flag rated park and has millions of visitors each year. It's a significant cultural hub and as such we are looking to generate income from holding social events. The "All points East" events generated £3m for the council and this is key income that can be used to support residents. The commercial events policy has been revised and the threshold has been increased from 5,000 to 20,000 in line with other London Boroughs.

Questions 11.6 to 11.28 were not put due to lack of time. The written responses are attached at **Appendix A**.

**12. TO CONSIDER MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

Motions 12.1 was not considered due to lack of time.

The meeting ended at 10.30 p.m.

Speaker of the Council