

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children & Education
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Adults and Health Services
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Sabina Khan	

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
Councillor Abu Chowdhury	(Cabinet Member for Safer Communities)

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Denise Radley	(Corporate Director Health Adult Social Care & Deputy Chief Executive)
Doug Plumer	(Business Intel & Performance Lead)
Simon Baxter	(Director of Public Realm)
John Harrison	(Interim Director of Finance, Procurement and Audit)
Ahsan Khan	(Head of Strategic Finance (Chief Accountant))
Simon Smith	(Head of Community Safety)
Angela Burns	(Public Health Programme Manager)
Filuck Miah	(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Farzana Chowdhury	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Musthak Ahmed gave apologies, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury chaired the meeting in the absence.

The Mayor and Chief Executive also gave their apologies for the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

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

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

Minutes of the previous committee meeting will be presented at a future committee meeting.

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Strategic Performance & Delivery Reporting Q2 2023-24

Cllr Saied Ahmed presented the report on the council's strategic performance & delivery in Q2 2023-24 with Denise Radley, Simon Baxter and Doug Plumber.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- Can we have an update on the recycling rate since the Mayor has declared a Waste Emergency? We have not seen an improvement since the emergency was declared. Under Covid-19, the recycling rate was not this low and the council managed to get through the pandemic. Officers have confirmed that the industrial action taken has affected the recycling rate and waste in general. The waste emergency will see an impact on over 13 different services. The council has taken steps to recover from this, along with presenting a plan to the GLA, which will be presented in 2024.
- The low percentage of recycling rate, quarter on quarter is very concerning. This was well before the industrial action. Officers confirmed that the recycling rate is low and there is no quick fix for that. There are big concerns on recycling rates in the high-rise buildings particularly.
- Members stated that officers were unable to explain what action has been taken under the Waste Emergency so far. The Mayor and the cabinet should be present to explain this plan.
- Missed collections of waste needs to be addressed and reported correctly within the data.
- Why was the measure on street cleansing not been submitted as a performance indicator? Officers confirmed that they will follow up in the street cleansing indicators.
- The council is spending a lot of time on estate cleaning, which is being impacted by poor collection rates.
- Can officers detail what are is the state of play around refuse collection vehicles? Officers detailed the on the road vehicles and ones in reserves. Officers will follow up in writing.

- Why did the council revise attendance performance indicators? Officers confirmed a written answer will be provided.
- Can officers explain the performance about care admissions? Officers detailed the care admissions for care homes and residential, which has been corrected in the reporting and will be shown in future reporting.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

4.2 Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Quarter 2

Cllr Saied Ahmed presented the report on the council's budget monitoring for 2023/24 Quarter 2, with Ahsan Khan.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- What are the council plans for reducing agency staff? Cllr Saied Ahmed agreed that the spending on agency staff was high, and it is being reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- What are the impacts on closing business to the council on business rates and council tax? Officers will provide a written response on this.
- There are pressures on the council budget on rehoming and supporting residents who find themselves homeless, how much is spent on housing residents in expensive hotel based temporary accommodation? Officers will respond in writing on this issue.
- Staff within housing services have raised concerns with how the service has run, leading to costly overspends.
- What actions have been taken to ensure the council remains in a good financial position, with the external local and national pressures? Officers highlighted the internal boards that the council has to review spending. The boards have helped see where spending is growing, and intervention can be applied.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the report.

5. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

5.1 Update on draft Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment

Cllr Abu Chowdhury gave a presentation on the draft Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment with Simon Smity and Angela Burns.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- How do we engage with those who did not take up training? What communications can the council take up to reach those who do not think the training is for them? Officers highlighted the work that has been done engaging with schools and local businesses, but also how important the work around prevention is.
- What are the Mayor's own targets for VAWG, as it feels like the council is scaling back in this area? Officers stated that this is the biggest year for VAWG funding and shows the council is taking violence in the community very seriously.
- When the council runs campaigns, like the 16 days of activism campaign for VAWG, it is important to ensure that information is captured and recorded appropriately.
- Some of the language needs to be reconsidered, like the wording around male allies and empowering men, where this needs to be women centred.
- Housing is an area that needs to be urgently reviewed as a safeguarding area for the work of VAWG. Officers detailed the emergency accommodation for vulnerable women across the borough, stating how the council is considered good in this area. The council is working towards gaining best practice accreditation in this area.
- The strategy needs to consider what advice is given out to residents to ensure it is compliant with the law but also empathic of those who are in a vulnerable situation.
- The strategy should seek to engage with all members to gain a picture of what is going on with residents across the borough.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the presentation

6. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

The Committee agreed Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Unrestricted Cabinet Papers to be submitted to Cabinet.

7. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the action log.

9. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Update

10. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

11. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

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

13. 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.

14. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 20:38

Chair,
Overview & Scrutiny Committee