

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 18:30 ON MONDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	
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 Maisha Begum	
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny Lead for Housing and Regeneration
Councillor Sabina Khan	

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Saied Ahmed	(Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living)
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Co-optees Present in Person:

Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Julie Lorraine	(Corporate Director for Resources)
Abdulzarack Kassim	(Finance Director Deputy Section 151 Officer)
Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Thomas French	(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

John Harrison	(Director of Finance (Deputy S151))
Paul Patterson	(Corporate Director Housing Regeneration)
Robert Woollatt	(Head of Strategic & Corporate Finance)
Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Lead)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Abdul Mannan and Sabina Khan gave their apologies and joined the meeting online. Jahid Ahmed gave his apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received at the meeting. Cllr Mannan declared that he was a board director at the Bromley by Bow Center.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

The minutes of the committee will be presented at a future committee meeting.

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5. BUDGET REPORT 2024-25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024-27

Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, gave a presented the Budget Report 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-27, with Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director for Resources, Abdulzarack Kassim, Finance Director Deputy Section 151 Officer.

The committee made the following comments and questions:

- What are the main risks to the council carrying out this proposed budget and what are the planned mitigation measures? Officers detailed the potential risks, including reliance on commercial activity and issues raised by housing within the borough. However, mitigation measures include targeting new services for commercial ventures and internal governance procedures to access budgetary issues as they occur.
- Members stated concern that the council seemed to deliberately delay announcing the greater raise in council tax to later in the budget setting process.
- The large increase of council tax was not apart of the bulk of the budget consultation with members, why did this proposal come so late? What changed so dramatically to lead to the raise in the council tax? Officers confirmed that a changing climate in government funding and not wanting to rely on further usage of council reserves, has led to a larger raise in council tax.
- Does the council consider that they fully understand the level of exception they have in place to ensure the council tax rise does not affect those who are most vulnerable within the borough? Officers stated that they believe they have put in place a scheme that supports residents in the borough, while raising income to fund services. However after a year, members of the council, officers and stakeholders will be able to see what a year of the scheme has done, and it can be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

- What does the council have in place to cover the over £2m shortage in funding for services? Cllr Saied Ahmed stated that the council will be focusing on income generation rather than drawing from reserves to fund services.
- Can you provide a breakdown of savings in the Mayor's Office? What staff have been redeployed? Officers stated that savings are across different teams and will see a major reduction in the usage of consultants among other areas. A lot of the staff will be part of a single point of resident enquiry, within customer service. Many of the casework staff within the Mayor's office will now be within general roles within the customer service team.
- Members expressed concern at the delay at obtaining details of job descriptions and salaries of the Mayor's Office.
- What work is being done to ensure that the Granby Community Hub, and Somali Senior Citizens Club and Women's Group is being funded and supported appropriately? Cllr Saied Ahmed highlighted how more resources have gone into the hub and allow for more services to run for the Somali community. More funding would be welcome but the initial funding supports a growth in support for the hub.
- Can officers outline the sustainability of budgeting around the Women's Resource Centre? Officers confirmed the revenue budget costs of the Women's Centre to run over 3 years.

The committee made the following recommendations:

1. The council does not need to increase council tax by 3 per cent
2. Households which currently do not fall in the council tax support scheme, should be reviewed to see if they need further support
3. To consider a rental cap or not to increase council housing rent.
4. For the council to consider the impact private renter increases are having on residents.

The chair thanked committee members, officers and Cllr Saied Ahmed for the hard work in preparing the budget and efficient scrutiny across the council's budget setting process.

RESOLVED:

The committee noted the report.

6. FORTHCOMING DECISIONS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the forward plan.

7. VERBAL UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY LEADS

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Update.

8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE QUERY AND ACTION LOG

RESOLVED:

Members noted the officer updates on committee action.

9. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

10. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT

Nil items.

11. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF UNRESTRICTED CABINET PAPERS

Nil items.

12. REQUESTS TO SUBMIT PETITIONS

Nil items.

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

14. 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.

15. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

16. EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

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

The Chair highlighted the Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Challenge Session on Markets on 6 March 2024.

The meeting ended at 20:12

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee