

Non-Executive Report of the: Council 8 th May 2024	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Linda Walker, Interim Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer	Classification: Unrestricted
Petitions to Council	

Originating Officer(s)	Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services
Wards affected	All wards

SUMMARY

1. This report sets out details of the valid petitions submitted for presentation and debate at this Council meeting. The text of the petitions received are set out in the attached report.
2. The Council's Constitution provides for up to four petitions to be heard at each ordinary Council meeting. These are taken in order of receipt, except those petitions for debate (in excess of 2,000 signatures) will take precedence. Should more than four petitions be received, all remaining petitions will be listed to be formally noted by Council.
 - a. There is one petition to be heard:
 - Petition to Defend Free Speech and Democracy
 - b. There are no petitions to be debated or noted.

PETITIONS TO BE HEARD

3. For Petitions listed as to be heard:
 - a. Petitioners may address the meeting for no more than 3 minutes.
 - b. Members may then question the petitioners for a further 4 minutes.
 - c. Finally, the speaker will invite the Mayor or (at the Mayor's discretion) the relevant Lead Member or Committee Chair to respond to the petition for up to 2 minutes. The petition will then be referred to the relevant Corporate Director for attention who will provide a written response within 28 days of the date of the meeting.
4. Members, other than a Cabinet Member or Committee Chair responding at the end of the item, should confine their contributions to questions and not make statements or attempt to debate.
5. Responses to all petitions will be sent to the lead petitioner and displayed on the Council's website.

5.1 Petition to Defend Free Speech and Democracy

Statement:

We the undersigned are petitioning Tower Hamlets' mayor and council because we have real concerns about the government led Prevent programme as it directly affects the Muslim community in this borough. The experience of Muslims who live, work and study in Tower Hamlets, especially the experience of Muslim young people and their families, demonstrate clearly that Prevent is a racist, Islamophobic policy and a restriction on our right to free speech.

That situation has become more acute because the UK government is giving political and material support to the Israeli government in the conflict that is inflicting death and suffering on the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank.

The people of Tower Hamlets are showing great resilience at this difficult time. Many have demonstrated their support and sympathy for the Palestinian people, but we are still fearful of the consequences. Many of the borough's Muslim parents are worried that a child's innocent comment could lead to them being hauled before Prevent. In some situations, Muslim community members and parents have come together to resist the threat of Prevent, as happened recently in our neighbouring borough, Waltham Forest, but in most cases we feel too isolated to do that.

At the same time, we know that many of Tower Hamlets educators, social workers etc feel unhappy and compromised by Prevent, regardless of their religion or ethnic identity.

Therefore, we call on Tower Hamlets' Mayor Lutfur Rahman and Tower Hamlets' Council to:

- Call a meeting and a series of local meetings in Tower Hamlets for members of the community to speak about our experience with Prevent, and publish the findings of such meetings;

Signatures received: 53