

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
Motion for debate submitted by the Administration	

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

SUMMARY

1. Council Procedure Rule 11 allows for time at each Ordinary Council meeting for the discussion of one specific Motion submitted by the Administration. The debate will follow the rules of debate at Council Procedure Rule 13 and will last no more than 30 minutes.
2. The motion submitted is listed overleaf. The Administration Motion is submitted by the Aspire Group.
3. Motions must be about matters for which the Council or its partners has a direct responsibility. A motion may not be moved which is substantially the same as a motion which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the previous six months; or which proposes that a decision of the Council taken in the previous six months be rescinded; unless notice of the motion is given signed by at least twenty Members.
4. Notice of any proposed amendments to the Motions must be given to the Monitoring Officer by Noon the day before the meeting.

MOTION

Set out overleaf is the motion that has been submitted.

ADMINISTRATION MOTION FOR DEBATE – MOTION ON A PROGRESSIVE COUNCIL: TWO YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION AND RECOVERY

Proposed by: Cllr Saied Ahmed

Seconded by: Cllr Maium Talukdar

This council notes:

- That two years have passed since the re-election of Mayor Lutfur Rahman and the *Aspire* group.
- That these two years have seen huge levels of investment – not only financially, but also of time; energy; and dedication – to ensure that the Council could begin to deliver services and governance worthy of the residents of Tower Hamlets.
- That upon returning to Office, the Mayor and his Councillors inherited a Council which was financially unstable – with six years of accounts unsigned; £20million of missed savings targets; millions of pounds lent to neighbouring authorities during the COVID-19 and cost-of-living crises; unpaid VAT receipts of over £1million over six years; £11million of unreconciled adult social care payments with significant risk or duplication; spiralling costs to complete the new Town Hall; and grants awarded through single-applicant processes. There were also governance issues – with five years of unsigned *Annual Governance Statements*; one-year budget-setting processes; struggling statutory services, reflected in failed Ofsted and Youth Justice reports; rising crime and community safety issues; and a string of interim Corporate Directors in statutory positions, including the Section 151.
- That public services significantly reduced with minimal resources expended to develop a thriving and accessible network of delivery. Instead, reserves were increased, all while the services available to residents were allowed to decline and – in some cases – disappear completely.
- That the introduction of the controversial Fire and Hire Policy by the previous Administration led to a palpable loss of staff morale, likely to be the lowest ever given the 90% support for a strike when Unison held a ballot. The introduction of inferior contracts through the *TOWER* rewards scheme contributed to a negative impact on workforce. This was reflected in a council-wide strike, involving national Trade Union leaders.
- That this was compounded by a disconnect between the Mayor’s Office and the then-Corporate Leadership Team, allowing a ‘two-council culture’ to develop, hindering service delivery and strategic clarity in the process.
- That at the earliest possible opportunity – Full Council July 2022 – this administration called for a ‘Council-wide’ audit to identify the failings that had been hindering delivery; good governance; and fiscal prudence over the previous seven years.

This council believes:

- That the radical measures taken by the current Administration, to reinvest in key services and clean up bad governance and financial practice across the Council, has led to a recovery and reinvigoration of service delivery and performance across the Authority.

- That, through the holistic transformation of how the Council sets its budgets – underpinned by a three-year MTFS strategy and regular financial health checks – residents can now access a range of services that have been funded sustainably, allowing for their sustainability and delivery into the future.
- That the reintroduction and reinvigoration of such key services as the Education Maintenance Allowance; University Bursaries; Free School Meals for all students up to the age of 16; £10million investment to support residents through the cost of living crisis; a universal freeze for all residents in the first year and as per the Aspire Manifesto a continuing freeze for the poorest to protect low and middle earners; additional investment in the Youth Service receiving nearly £11million extra a year; strengthened community safety, through the recruitment of 42 additional Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers, enveloped funds for extra police officers and new CCTV infrastructure; reconnecting and listening to residents through the reopening of 5 residents hubs across the borough; improving residents health and wellbeing through the insourcing of the Council’s leisure services, ensuring that no resident is left behind; protecting the environment through the planting of thousands of new trees, the retrofitting of Council buildings with green technology and through the installation of over a thousand Electric Vehicle charging points, with more to come; and a revitalised and resourced Waste Service, has slowly seen the Council and borough return from years of cuts and neglect to a position of delivery and resident satisfaction.
- That this progress and ambition was identified and commended in the recent LGA Corporate Peer Review. The Council has also won awards for its Town Hall; Free School Meals service; as well as being nominated for nine other parliamentary and national awards.
- That the strides taken to redress and resolve the financial and governance issues inherited from the previous administration – facilitated by a new one-council culture where the Mayor and Corporate Management Team work together to solve issues – has ensured that the financial and operational health of the Council has been drastically improved.
- That this is reflected in a transformative and sustainable MTFS programme; a clean and audited set of accounts; up-to-date *Annual Governance Statements*; repaid outstanding VAT receipts; well-run and improved performance in key statutory services; and an ongoing council-wide restructuring to further strengthen and improve good governance and performance across the organisation.
- That the improvements made are looking to make Tower Hamlets one of the best run and ambitious Local Authorities, not only in London, but in the entire country.

This council resolves:

- To continue to support the Best Value Inspectors in their examination of the Council, and to offer to share best practice for other authorities looking to implement similar improvements.
- To continue to work with and implement the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Review.
- To constantly undergo self-examination and evaluation, identifying ways in which it can improve while continuing to deliver for the people who matter most, the residents.

- To continue to strive for excellence across the council's services, and look beyond the next two years to the future, to ensure that such delivery can be sustained for future generations.