

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**MINUTES OF THE CABINET****HELD AT 4.10 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 16 MAY 2024****COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL****Members Present in Person:**

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| Mayor Lutfur Rahman | |
| Councillor Maium Talukdar | (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning (Statutory Deputy Mayor)) |
| Councillor Kabir Ahmed | (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding) |
| Councillor Saied Ahmed | (Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living) |
| Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury | (Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care) |
| Councillor Abu Chowdhury | (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities) |
| Councillor Abdul Wahid | (Cabinet Member for Customer Service, Equalities and Social Inclusion) |
| Councillor Musthak Ahmed | (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Enterprise, Skills and Growth) |
| Councillor Shafi Ahmed | (Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency) |
| Councillor Kamrul Hussain | (Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation) |

Officers Present in Person:

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| John Ainsworth | (Senior Performance Improvement Analyst) |
| Dr Somen Banerjee | (Director of Public Health) |
| Simon Baxter | (Corporate Director Communities) |
| Catherine Boyd | (Head of Arts, Parks and Events) |
| Stephen Halsey | (Chief Executive) |
| Sam Harney | (Mayor's Political Advisor) |
| Afazul Hoque | (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy) |
| Abidah Kamali | Policy Officer Housing |
| Abdulrazak Kassim | (Director Finance, Procurement and Audit) |
| Julie Lorraine | (Corporate Director Resources) |
| Hibo Mohamed | (Senior Commissioning Manager) |
| Katie O'Driscoll | (Director of Adult Social Care) |
| Paul Patterson | (Interim Corporate Director Housing And Regeneration) |
| Steve Reddy | (Corporate Director, Children's Services) |
| Keith Townsend | (Insourcing Leisure Project Director) |

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

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| Robin Beattie | (Acting Director of Strategy Innovation and |
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Ayesha Hakim Rahman Transformation)
(Acting Deputy Director of Strategy, Improvement
and Transformation)
Nicola Klinger (Housing Companies Manager)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

There were none.

3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES

RESOLVED:

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 24 April be approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record of proceedings.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) FROM THE MAYOR

The Mayor welcomed the new members of the Cabinet to their first meeting:

- Councillor Shafi Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency)
- Councillor Musthak Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Enterprise, Skills and Growth)
- Councillor Kamrul Hussain (Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation)

He also noted that Councillor Abdul Wahid had a new portfolio, Equalities and Social Inclusion.

He expressed his thanks to the departing Cabinet members for their support and hard-work in previous years.

5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions

The Mayor welcomed the newly elected Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Jahed Choudhury, to his first Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Jahed Choudhury informed the Mayor and Cabinet of his delight to be elected as the Chair of the Committee, which he felt performed a critical function in the Council's governance and supported democracy. He looked forward to helping the Mayor shape policy and to influence decision making in

the Council. He also looked forward to working with the Cabinet in the year ahead. Finally, Councillor Choudhury expressed excitement at welcoming the Mayor to the first Mayoral Spotlight session, to be held by the Committee later in the month.

5.2 Any Unrestricted Decisions "Called in" by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

None.

6. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Transforming Tower Hamlets Council: building a stronger future

The Mayor introduced the report that updated the Mayor and Cabinet on the Council's 'People First' transformation journey and detailed the significant progress made in addressing the following key concerns identified by the Head of Paid Services:

- Fostering a more collaborative and performance-driven culture.
- Securing greater financial understanding, compliance & stability.
- Embedding a resident-centric focus.
- Improving transparency and accountability.
- Demonstrating measurable progress across key performance indicators and achieving external recognition.
- Making significant strides in the delivery across all strategic priorities.
- Continuing commitment to creating a workforce to reflect the community.
- Ensuring continued adherence to the Best Value Duty.

Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive provided more details on the programme. He referred to the issues highlighted in the Deloitte audit reports between 2018-2020 and 2020 which had pointed out deficiencies in financial reporting, risk management, and performance oversight within the Council. These shortcomings necessitated a new approach to address historical issues and drive continuous improvement. Stephen explained that the key action points of the programme include:

1. Strengthening strategic alignment with the administration's priorities.
2. Cultivating a culture of continuous improvement.
3. Implementing a new target operating model and compliance infrastructure.
4. Establishing a Transformation Advisory Board supported by specialised boards
5. Introducing a performance dashboard for enhanced monitoring and decision-making.

Ayesha Hakim Rahman, (Acting Deputy Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation) provided more detail on the performance dashboard which would provide regular updates and scrutiny on the Council's transformation progress against key measures.

Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director Resources, explained how The Council is implementing structural changes to enhance MTFS delivery and invest in key support functions like HR, procurement, and scrutiny. The centralisation of HR and procurement services, completed in 2022, aimed to improve efficiency and tackle outdated processes and lack of technology. A new focus would be on enhancing services rather than cost-cutting, with plans to tailor support functions to departmental needs. Emphasis is on technology adoption, process redefinition, and returning relevant functions to departments. The goal is to support corporate directors effectively in MTFS implementation. Notably, a focus on specific needs for different departments, like adult social care versus housing schemes, will guide tailored service delivery. Overall, the objective is to improve services, recognize diverse departmental requirements, and achieve better outcomes through strategic restructuring efforts.

Each remaining Corporate Director provided a brief explanation of how the transformation journey would assist improvements in their services of Adult Social Care, Housing and Regeneration, Communities and Childrens Services.

Cabinet members welcomed the report and expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to work towards achieving the Mayor's vision. They expressed hope to do their part to exceed expectations by delivering high-quality services for residents, being visible, challenging, and collaborating closely with officers to enhance services for the borough's people through proactive engagement.

The Mayor welcomed the report. He explained how his election in 2022 had faced him with immediate challenges of accountability, transparency, and silo working within the Council. Under his leadership, significant improvements had been made towards fostering community engagement, enhancing corporate management, and restructuring directorates. The implementation of a new target operating model had enabled better financial insights and increased accountability among staff. A focus on frontline employees' involvement and empowerment has resulted in impactful changes and streamlined processes, improving efficiency in recruitment. The new Reorganisation Board provided a holistic view for real-time actions and empowered departments to act promptly. The initiatives had driven positive change and provided a renewed energy, and a culture of delivery and progress within the Council.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Notes the council's significant achievements over the past year in building a stronger Tower Hamlets.
2. Supports the commitment outlined in Section 3.6 of the report to redefine the corporate centre. This restructuring aims to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, ultimately maximising value for the council.

3. Notes that the risks identified within this report are addressed as part of the wider reports presented in this Cabinet meeting agenda pack. These reports include Leisure Insourcing, Housing Options, and Scrutiny. Additionally, the May 2024 HR Committee and Audit Committee agendas address related risk mitigation strategies in HR, Recruitment, and Procurement.

6.2 Delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The Mayor noted and agreed the reasons for urgency as set out in the report.

Councillor Saied Ahmed introduced the report that provide an update on the current MTFs position, actions being taken to mitigate the identified risks and further options to consider to mitigate and manage any emerging risks. The primary objective is to ensure delivery of the 2024/25 budget which forms year one of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as approved by full Council on 28th February 2024.

Councillor Ahmed explained the crucial need for the Council to deliver £43.3 million in savings while managing national pressures in homelessness and adult social care in alignment with the 2024/25 budget. He briefly explained actions for savings delivery, monitoring budget execution, additional capacity requirements, and efforts to deliver financial sustainability, emphasising strong reserves and contingencies. He explained that a financial sustainability plan outlined pre-emptive measures to address unexpected budget challenges and prevent reaching Section 114 status.

Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive, commended the Director of Resources adaptability and commitment to working with the Cabinet Member for Resources, highlighting the outstanding results delivered amid resource challenges.

The Mayor welcomed the report and contributions from all speakers. He stressed the importance of financial stability and sustainability for residents. He commended the move back to a three-year budget cycle. He expressed his appreciation for the efforts led by Steve and Julie and their teams in steering the Council towards income optimisation, service improvements, and accountable service delivery to fulfil promises to the borough's residents.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Notes the actions being taken to deliver the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved on 28th February 2024.

6.3 Be Well Leisure Insourcing Programme

The Mayor noted and agree the reasons for urgency as set out in the report.

Councillor Kamrul Hussain, Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation, introduced the report that provided an updated position in respect of the insourcing of the *Be Well* Leisure Service that returned in-house on 1st May 2024. Councillor Hussain explained that the report set out what has been achieved to date to ensure the effective mobilisation of the new council service, details of the project management structure, risk management arrangements and high level risk profile, the key activities for the coming year coordinated by the Leisure Programme Board to further develop the service over the next 12 months now it is in-house. The report also identified the capital funding requirements as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and sets out the 10-year financial revenue model projected for the service.

Simon Baxter, (Corporate Director Public Realm), provided detail on future leisure plans, which included state-of-the-art facilities, housing accommodation to meet the borough's needs, and opportunities for income generation to boost commercial viability. By leveraging assets, the Council aims to enhance resident offerings, drive income generation, and maximize asset utilization to create a stronger and more prosperous community environment.

Keith Townsend, (Insourcing Leisure Project Director) explained how the rationale for change in Tower Hamlets' health and leisure services is data-driven, aligning with residents' feedback and broader organisational goals like public health and employment initiatives. He explained some of the key outcomes to date, including the opening of leisure centres, bringing in new staff, and enhancing facility conditions through repairs. A comprehensive 10-year investment plan aimed to improve the leisure estate, supported by a revenue model anticipating budget surplus by year 4. Robust governance structures would ensure effective risk management.

The Mayor and Cabinet members expressed excitement at the new leisure insourcing journey and the accompanying capital program aimed at delivering new leisure centres and services accessible to the Tower Hamlets community, which it was hoped would address health inequality.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet

1. Notes the progress made to create and launch the *Be Well* Leisure Service.
2. Endorses the approach to develop the *Be Well* Leisure Service in 2024/25.
3. Authorises the Programme Director for Leisure to produce a revised programme budget for 2024/25 within the financial limit of the approved budget.
4. Notes the *Be Well* Leisure Service 10-year revenue financial model including projections for an operating revenue surplus from year four.

5. Notes the progress on the asset condition surveys, the building dilapidations work, repairs undertaken by GLL and the leisure assets capital investment requirements for the next 10-years and support officers to develop proposals as part of the MTFS.
6. Notes the £3.65 million Be Well leisure assets capital programme for 2024/25 and authorise the Programme Director for Leisure to implement and amend the programme as required.
7. Notes and comment on the key risks and mitigating actions to manage those risks.
8. Supports the Be Well Leisure Service to maximise benefits from synergies with other council teams including Public Health and Workpath to reflect the council's strategic priorities.

6.4 Scrutiny improvement plan

The Mayor noted and agree the reasons for urgency as set out in the report and noted the pre-decision scrutiny questions and responses as had been tabled.

The Mayor introduced the report that identified areas for improvement in the Council's Scrutiny function and a set of dedicated actions to address them. The Mayor noted that some suggested ways forward will need to be the subject of further discussion and approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There will be full engagement with scrutiny members when developing the annual forward plan and the vehicle to do it.

Robin Beattie, Director Strategy, Improvement and Partnership, provided further detail. Robin explained how the scrutiny function within the Council was integral to good governance by holding the executive accountable and driving transformation. Efforts were underway to enhance scrutiny's efficiency, effectiveness, and support for members, recognising areas for improvement in administration and member empowerment. Collaborative initiatives involving the Local Government Association aimed to elevate the scrutiny process and foster cross-party collaboration. Recommendations span five key areas, including

- enhancing scrutiny's profile,
- supporting members,
- engaging with the community,
- learning from peers, and
- fostering internal collaboration.

The focus is on empowering the scrutiny function to drive positive change through a culture of improvement and collaboration, with recommendations intended to enrich oversight and governance processes within the Council.

Steve Halsey, Chief Executive added that he had been focusing on improving the officer structures supporting scrutiny. A development session highlighted the need to prevent politicisation of scrutinised issues to maintain focus on adding value and achieving meaningful outcomes.

The Mayor welcomes the report and stressed the value he placed on input from all elected Members, particularly valuing suggestions from experienced opposition members to learn and collaborate constructively. He aimed to be open to feedback and constructive criticism to improve governance practices. He did acknowledge the potential for political sentiments in discussions to sometimes hinder effective outcomes. Finally, he expressed hope that the inclusion of an opposition councillor as scrutiny lead for environment and climate demonstrated the Council's commitment to broadening expertise and fostering collaboration across party lines.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Notes and endorse the improvements to training and support for Members.
2. Notes and endorse the approach taken to improve the effectiveness of the role of Statutory Scrutiny Officer.
3. Notes and agree the approach to be taken to improve the Overview and Scrutiny support function
4. Notes and endorse the officer actions to further enhance a positive relationship between scrutiny and the Executive comprising :
 - a review of scrutiny procedures in relation to the recently published good practice guides from the Centre for Public Scrutiny
 - the facilitation of a Scrutiny Protocol addressing issues such as how Cabinet will engage with scrutiny recommendations at Cabinet and establishing a process that supports a formal response to all issues referred to Cabinet by overview and scrutiny including recommendations, questions or calls for action.
 - As part of the review of the constitution reviewing the Scrutiny Procedures and the Scrutiny Toolkit set out in the Constitution, simplifying where useful.
5. Notes and endorse the actions to be taken to raise understanding and awareness of officers of the role of scrutiny.
6. Notes and endorse the proposals to increase the public profile and understanding of the scrutiny function of the council
7. Notes the specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 6.1 of the report.

6.5 Contracts Forward Plan 2023/24 - Quarter 4

The Mayor noted and agreed the reasons for urgency as set out in the report.

Councillor Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living, introduced the report setting out a forward plan of supply and service contracts over £1m in value, or capital works contracts over £5m.

With regards to contract extension requests in the report, the Mayor reminded all officers he would agree contract extensions only by exception in future; open procurement should be the default approach for all procurement activity.

Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director, Resources, advised of an error in the report: ref HAC5983 Culturally Sensitive Substance Misuse Service, the Value Total should read “£1,000,000 (Over the entire maximum contract period)”. The Mayor noted and agreed the amendment.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Authorises the appropriate Corporate Director in consultation with the Mayor to award those contracts set out in Appendix 1 to the report, subject to the amendment above, following an appropriate procurement exercise.
2. Authorises the Director Legal Services (Monitoring Officer), to execute all necessary contract documents in respect of the awards of contracts.

6.6 Tower Hamlets Council Strategic Plan: 2024/25 Annual Delivery Plan

The Mayor introduced the report that described what activities the council will deliver against the priorities of the Strategic Plan 2022-26.

The Mayor and Cabinet noted the updated version of Appendix 2 as had been published.

The Mayor welcomed the report and expressed strong hope that all historically underperforming areas would be rectified in the coming year.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Approve the Annual Delivery Plan for 2024/25 (Appendix 1 to the report).
2. Approve the refreshed performance measures for 2024/25 (Appendix 2 to the report, as updated).
3. Note that the target setting for 2024/25 performance measures will be developed and reported to Mayor and Members in July 2024.

6.7 Procurement of a Technology Enabled Care Transformation Partner

Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care introduced the report that requested Mayor in Cabinet approval to start the procurement of the Technology Enabled Care TEC Transformation Partner.

The Mayor welcomed the report which he hoped would save money, whilst enhancing the customer journey, and prioritising the needs of vulnerable residents. He urged officers to flag any risks early to avoid issues later on.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Agrees to the use of the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework for Technology Enabled Care Services (Lot 2) for the procurement of the transformation partner to support delivery of the Technology Enabled Care Transformation.
2. Authorises the Corporate Director, Health and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Mayor, to award the contract to the winning bidder.
3. Notes the Equalities Impact Assessment / specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 4 of the report.

6.8 Tower Hamlets Partnership Review

The Mayor introduced the report that set out the draft Partnership Plan (2023-2028) 'Tower Hamlets for All'.

The Mayor welcomed the report and expressed his thanks to officers and Members for their work to deliver it.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Notes the recommendations (section 3.15), and guiding principles for thematic partnerships, ahead of consideration by the Partnership Executive Group (PEG) in May 2024.

6.9 Victoria Park Licence to Occupy

Councillor Kamrul Hussain, Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation, introduced the report that proposed that the Council extends the licence to occupy arrangement, approved by Cabinet on 31 January 2024, to enable AEG Presents Ltd to deliver events in Victoria Park from August 2024 to September 2027 (at times to be specifically agreed). Councillor Hussain explained that this approach will enable the Council to continue to maintain its parks and open spaces as central government grants reduce further over the coming years and provide increased opportunities for residents and visitors to

engage with a wide range of events including free to access community event days.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Approves the option to enter into a Licence to Occupy with AEG Presents Limited as required.
2. Authorises the Corporate Director of Communities to instruct the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, to execute and enter into all necessary agreements to give effect to the implementation of Resolution 1;
3. Notes the Equalities specific considerations as set out in Paragraph 4 of the report.

7. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

7.1 Housing with Care Strategy 2024-2034

The Mayor noted and agreed the reasons for urgency as set out in the report.

Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, introduced the report that set out the background behind the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Housing with Care Strategy 2024-2034. The strategy provides a robust model for the mix of Care settings required to support the growth in population size and evolving complexity of need to meet the increase in demand for Adult Social Care. It sets out the areas where further development and investment is needed to be able to provide high quality housing with care options to the most vulnerable residents. In addition, it seeks permission to formally adopt the strategy and further develop and approve the annual delivery plan.

The Mayor welcomed the report.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Agrees and approves the proposed Strategy.
2. Agrees that options for additional housing with care settings are developed as part of the delivery plan for the proposed Strategy and that these come back to the Council's Cabinet meeting at a future date.

7.2 Improving the Homelessness Service

The Mayor noted and agreed the reasons for urgency as set out in the report. Councillor Jahed Choudhury, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, informed attendees that he had received the reasons for the urgency and he agreed that the decision was urgent and that he felt it was reasonable for the Mayor to consider the report at this Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, introduced the report that sought significant additional investment to the resources available to the Council's Housing Options Service, to address its fundamental structural issues driven by lack of a cogent and adapted service design and delivery plan and missing front-line resources that have been offset by an increase in management positions. Proposals include frontline capacity improvements, enhanced training, reduced staff turnover, and a task group for immediate implementation and progress monitoring. Transparency, rapid reform, and resident-focused care would be prioritised to effect meaningful change swiftly and restore trust in the service.

The Mayor welcomed the report. He explained that since his election in 2022 he had deep concerns over the state of the housing and homelessness service, which he felt struggled from a lack of leadership, disconnected strategy, and inappropriate attitudes towards vulnerable residents. The service faced staff demoralisation, a lack of empathy, and systemic deficiencies leading to substandard services for vulnerable residents. He expressed deep concern at delays in addressing these issues, compounded by recent Ombudsman reports revealing serious failings. The Mayor reiterated that urgent action must happen to implement the solutions outlined in the report. In particular, the need for a cultural shift, enhanced customer service, and accountability for past failings.

RESOLVED that the Mayor in Cabinet:

1. Approves the immediate release £1.93m additional revenue allocation from the council's budgeted service contingency general fund provision for improvements to the Housing Options homelessness services as summarised in section 3.5 and detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.
2. Agrees that the service improvements will include:
 - Development of capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support by identifying gaps, shortages and whether there are capacity and skills issues.
 - A full and complete service review and redesign, with immediate reorganisation to be initiated.
 - Cultural and structural changes, to prevent staff churn and ensure that the newly recruited frontline workers are retained within the organisation.
 - Review of the structural composition of the service to identify key issues that may be affecting service delivery.
 - Review senior management arrangements and the performance across the service to understand the relationship with frontline workers, both outward facing and in the back office.
 - Establish a service review, with a view to creating a revised and refreshed service delivery plan to address key areas of cultural concerns and staffing shortages in the service.

3. Establishes a special taskforce designed to give focused and prioritised attention to overseeing the recruitment and restructuring of the service. This will include the Corporate Directors for Resources and Housing and Regeneration (or representative), a representative from the Mayor's Office, representatives from the Council's recognised Trade Unions and delegates from the service.
4. Notes the allocation of this additional funding in the current year will be built into the Medium-Term financial planning for future years and is not forecast to compromise the council's sustainable financial position across the current medium.
5. Notes contingency sums for the current year have been set aside within the approved budget for exactly such specific purpose. Our MTFs was approved by members with explicit reference to demand-based risks relating to temporary accommodation. Further information and assurance are set out in the Chief Financial Officer's comments at section 6 of the report.
6. Notes all impact on staffing will be compliant with the council's stated principles of focussing investment in front line services, protecting the lowest paid and avoiding compulsory redundancy situations wherever possible.
7. Notes the specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 4 of the report.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

A motion to exclude press and public was not required.

9. EXEMPT / CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

Nil items.

10. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10.1 Chair's Advice of Key Issues or Questions in Relation to Exempt / Confidential Business

Nil items.

10.2 Any Exempt / Confidential Decisions "Called in" by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Nil items.

11. EXEMPT / CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Nil items.

12. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 6.30 p.m.

Chair, Mayor Lutfur Rahman
Cabinet